

THE JUDGEMENT OF ILLINGBOROUGH

R. E. VERNEDE

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THE
JUDGEMENT OF ILLINGBOROUGH



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THE JUDGEMENT OF ILLINGBOROUGH

BY

R. E. VERNEDE

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CHAPTER I

MR. BEAVER DECIDES TO LISTEN

TEMPTATION which comes to all men at one time or another came to Mr. James Beaver irresistibly on a certain afternoon in June. It was not indeed the first time temptation had come to him, nor the first time that he had—not ungracefully—yielded. But all the temptations of an idle-minded man do not make a story, and this one did. Let it be placed to Mr. Beaver's credit, here and now, that without his suppleness in giving way several things counted of importance by those interested in them would not have happened. Later on, moralists may decide how much his credit stands at. No burdensome amount perhaps.

He was a tall, good-looking young man, with eyes set rather too closely to please any one but a woman. A woman—because only a woman (and not all women of course) would care for the concentrated gaze that resulted from it. A woman would be apt to think that the gazer had found her beauty spot, and could

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excuse the concentration out of her knowledge of the greatness of the attraction. A man would want to know what the fellow was looking at. Even vain men are less quick than women in matters of this sort.

Mr. Beaver had as accompaniment to his narrowing vision an impassivity of feature that some people think aristocratically English and others suggestive rather of a Sioux. He could look bored or deferential with only the smallest change of countenance. At the moment he looked deferential, as was his habit in dealing with his employer, Mr. Mortlake. That gentleman had just said to him, briefly and curtly—

“You will be good enough to take your papers to the dining-room and go on with the indexing there.”

“Certainly.”

“And I’ll see Mr. Waterlane here in five minutes,” said Mr. Mortlake, turning to the elderly butler who had just announced visitors. “I will have a glass of wine first, Bullock.”

“Yes, sir. There are two gentlemen—Mr. Waterlane and Mr. Illingborough.”

“I know. I will see both.”

“Yes, sir.”

The butler went out, and Mr. Beaver, having gathered his papers from the library table with the air of one who is solely interested in his work,

followed. He was not, in truth, in the least interested in his work, and, on the other hand, he was greatly interested in the lawyers' visit. It was clear that Mr. Mortlake was about to make his will. The old man had been ill for some days past, or rather for some days past had been unable to conceal the fact that he was ill. That well-known physician, Sir Cyprian Golding, had called several times; and work had distinctly flagged. All this looked like a serious illness—to any one knowing Mr. Mortlake and his hatred of fuss, and his fondness of parading his hardiness. "Work and you won't be ill" was one of the maxims (pestilential in Beaver's opinion) to which he clung with all an old man's obstinacy. The secretary himself often felt ill at the mere idea of having to toil all his days, until the time came when a man could work no longer and might starve for all that millionaires like old Mortlake cared.

If, however, the time had come for the old man to stop working, and with it the time for making his will, it would be extremely interesting to know in whose favour that will would be drawn, and what legacies there would be for faithful servants. Mr. Beaver had been in his present employment—as secretary and librarian—for something under a year. Not very long perhaps, but long enough in the ordinary course of events, presupposing, that is to

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say, a generous as well as an endlessly rich employer, for him to be able to count on something substantial, the more so as Mr. Mortlake was—to the best of his knowledge—without any near relatives. Only it is of little use presupposing wills. Often a man seems bent on identifying his last testament with his last disservice to those who knew him. And old Mortlake—it had to be confessed—had never appreciated his secretary's work very highly. Or if he did, he had omitted to mention the fact. Hints conveyed in no very roundabout way that a more strenuous secretary would suit him better, could not be considered as compliments even by the most practised self-deceiver. Silly old fool, to be so busy-minded at his age and with his possessions! Fancy a man with one leg in the grave slaving away at the revision of a book on scarabs. It was monstrous.

So much in the way of a conclusion Mr. Beaver had arrived at even before he had traversed the corridor separating the library from the dining-room. The absurdity of it all was too obvious to need reflection. But when he sat down at the table in the great room—a room that Mr. Mortlake with curious taste had filled largely from his famed collection of bronzes and ivories—so that it had become a museum of weird figures of gods and goddesses, with fixed leers and chiselled frowns, indecent majesties and

tyrannous deformities, made to endure by artists unknown and worshippers who had become dust—figures that Beaver considered revolting to dine with and unpleasant to work among (but any figures were that)—when he sat down in this room—a monument of his employer's whims—the young man grew not only disgusted but resentful. What right had a man to spend his money on such things, and yet have loads to leave just as the fancy took him? And how would the fancy take him? It was his inability to answer this question that caused the feeling of resentment to grow. Mr. Beaver felt that as Mr. Mortlake's secretary he had a right to know. As a rule, men trusted their secretaries, made intimates of them. He had never wanted to be intimate with Mr. Mortlake. The old fellow was too stiff and fierce—with a mind that ran on scarabs and archæology and galley-slaving—for any one to be able to sympathise with him. Still it was none the less outrageous, upon reflection, that his secretary had never been asked to sympathise, and hadn't the least inkling of how things were likely to go at this critical moment.

Curiosity is a powerful lever ; curiosity with resentment added is irresistible. Mr. Beaver had taken up his pen, had begun fiddling with his papers, but had given his attention solely to his grievance, when the

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sound of Bullock conducting the lawyers towards the library caught his ear. An impulse caused him to rise from his chair, go to the door, which was ajar, and peep through. The procession which Bullock was leading at his usual sober pace consisted of a small elderly gentleman of a very brisk but by no means agile appearance—obviously Mr. Waterlane—and a sturdier young man, so square as almost to seem stout, with fair hair and a solemn face.

Something about the young man's face brought back memories to Beaver. What had Bullock said the other lawyer's name was? Illingborough! Of course. Beaver remembered him clearly now. He had been at school with him. Rather a moral boy—Illingborough. Not exactly pious, but one of those conscientious kids who, without meaning any particular harm to their schoolfellows, set too prim a tone and encourage masters to think that any one with a little spirit in them is a nuisance. Beaver had been one of the spirited ones, and had in fact been expelled for one thing and another. He thought of Illingborough as a kid, because he himself had been a year or two his senior. He could remember patronising Illingborough, who regarded his elders at that time with great reverence. Not a bad sort of kid. Beaver had given him some lessons in bowling. He had a picture in his mind of Illingborough fagging

about the school field in a particularly hot sun after the balls which he—Beaver—had kindly slogged for him to fetch. Pertinacious kid in his way. He had fully believed that he was getting lessons in bowling, as indeed he was. Only—Beaver almost laughed aloud at the recollection of Illingborough stoutly and perseveringly trotting after those balls, and as grateful as anything for being allowed to bowl them. Beaver had left the school shortly after, so he could not know how Illingborough had fared then. Got on well, no doubt—the kind of kid that would. Probably taken a scholarship at one of the 'Varsities. And now he was one of Mr. Mortlake's lawyers.

Beaver's reminiscences, which had been amiable enough, turned to gall as he thought of this. A youth like that was to draw up Mr. Mortlake's will, to be taken into the confidence from which he himself had been excluded. He was to know all about the things which for Beaver had such a personal interest.

Suddenly it flashed across Beaver that the library had a small room attached to it, with a separate door opening into it. He had been into it that morning to consult some book of reference, and he remembered that the windows were open. Even if they had not been, it would have been possible to hear through the door. Why should he not go there and listen? There was nothing to prevent it. Nobody would

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dream of an eavesdropper in the next room. The servants were all too old and respectable for such a thing. And if there were no thought of a listener, there would be no search for one. Even if by some accident he should be discovered there, he could pretend he had gone to look up another reference.

The plan by nature of its ease and simplicity appealed so much to Mr. Beaver's primal instincts that there was no resisting it. He waited for Bullock to return down the corridor; then he himself slipped out of the dining-room and into the annexe of the library. He found that he could hear beautifully.

CHAPTER II

THE APPLE IS THROWN UPON THE BOARD

ALL the way from Abchurch Lane to the house in Piccadilly, which had been traversed in a cab, Mr. Waterlane had been so chatty and yet so secretive as considerably to mystify his junior partner. Being quite a junior, only recently admitted, and also possessing a highly developed bump of respect, Illingborough would not for worlds have interrogated Mr. Waterlane about matters upon which he did not choose to be communicative. Still he would have liked to know what the ordeal before him in connection with Mr. Mortlake's will—an ordeal which Mr. Waterlane kept hinting at—was likely to be. Mr. Waterlane, a little bird of a man with shrewd eyes guarded by spectacles, would only go on hinting. Not until they had dismissed their cabman—who on receiving his fare from Mr. Waterlane called that gentleman a human taximeter—did matters get much further. Even then, when they had been shown in and were waiting for Mr. Mortlake, matters did not get so very

much further. Mr. Waterlane remained mysterious rather than otherwise. He seemed, however, to be getting nearer to unfolding.

"I wonder," he said, sipping the glass of sherry which Bullock had provided—"I wonder how you will like Mr. Mortlake. You haven't met him, of course? He is one of our oldest clients. But he has not been near the office for years. Somewhat of a recluse. I should not personally have supposed that he had so much respect for us lawyers as his present intention presupposes. In fact, I remember his saying some distinctly derogatory things to me about the processes of the law on one occasion. In a humorous way of course. But there was always a strain of eccentricity about him." Mr. Waterlane paused for breath and fingered his glass. "I confess," he continued, "that I admire eccentricity—in others."

Illingborough had a vague notion that eccentricity was the last thing he should have suspected Mr. Waterlane of admiring. There was nothing Mr. Waterlane admired less in his clerks. But there was a distinction no doubt to be drawn between clerks and clients.

"Eccentricity," pursued Mr. Waterlane, "indicates a strong individuality. Not always, not always. In Mr. Mortlake it certainly does. He is decidedly an intellectual. I dare say, Illingborough, though you

haven't met him, you have read his book on scarabs?"

Illingborough said that he was afraid that he had not.

"Ah, you should," said Mr. Waterlane. "It's quite a classic, I believe. The last word on an intricate subject. He gave me a copy of it. You certainly ought to get the book—*The History of Scarabs*. Very interesting."

"It must be," said Illingborough.

"What makes it more so," said Mr. Waterlane, "is that it is probably his last. When the lease of the human tenement is decided by Sir Cyprian Golding, the chance of renewal is small. Yet he is not more than seventy. But there—in the midst of life, we are—hum——" Mr. Waterlane had forgotten how the quotation finished, so simply added, "Very sad!"

"Do I understand," said Illingborough, "that Mr. Mortlake is dying?"

"Well," said Mr. Waterlane, with a melancholy smile, "you need not tax him with it. People are often susceptible to remarks on the subject. But I fear that it is so. Now, Illingborough,"—Mr. Waterlane bent forward with a raised forefinger,—“I want you not to think him faddy. Young men often think anything out of the common run a fad. But as he is

entrusting his business to you, I want you to put away any bias. We mustn't be narrow."

"But might I ask," Illingborough began, considerably bewildered, "what the business is?"

"Mr. Mortlake will tell you himself," said Mr. Waterlane. "Ah," he said, as the door opened and the old butler entered, "I expect that means that Mr. Mortlake is ready for us."

Bullock said it did, and they followed him to the library, unaware of Mr. Beaver's watching from behind the dining-room door. They found Mr. Mortlake—an old man with iron-grey hair and beard and something of iron in his face—seated in his arm-chair. He held out his hand to Mr. Waterlane with an apology for not rising, then looked inquiringly at Illingborough.

"My junior partner—Mr. Illingborough," said Mr. Waterlane. "Mr. Illingborough has not been with me long, having of course only taken poor Tabb's place. But in conscientiousness and, I may add, the legal instinct, Illingborough excels most of us. We value his judgement very highly, very highly."

"Indeed," said Mr. Mortlake. He had been looking at Illingborough steadily from under bushy eyebrows. "Have you told him, Waterlane, what I want done?"

"No," said Mr. Waterlane; "I merely suggested that we were to assist in drawing up a will. Your

instructions to me being what they were—it seemed best——”

“Quite so. I prefer to tell him myself,” said Mr. Mortlake, and turned to Illingborough. “Now, sir, if you will be so good as to listen to me, I shall get to the point which I never can do with Waterlane.”

“Come, come,” began that gentleman genially, but was disregarded.

“I am told,” said Mr. Mortlake, “that in all probability I have not very long to live.”

“Doctors are so frequently pessimistic,” interposed Mr. Waterlane.”

“I pay mine so highly,” said Mr. Mortlake, “that they cannot afford to be pessimistic.”

“Still—*dum spiro*,” suggested Mr. Waterlane.

“I am aware of the quotation,” said Mr. Mortlake. “And if to hope will give you any satisfaction, pray do so.” He glared at Mr. Waterlane and turned to Illingborough again. “Under these circumstances I have decided to make my will. I am a wealthy man, and I am told it is the thing to do. Waterlane says so. What do you say, Mr. Illingborough?”

Illingborough started a little, the question was so sudden.

“I think,” he said gravely, “that money is not among the good things that can be interred with one.”

The old man nodded.

"Good," he said. "You mean, I take it, that it is the last responsibility. Well, so it seems to me."

"Not that I have much experience of it," said Illingborough modestly.

"You probably know this," said Mr. Mortlake, "that money is often left erratically. It goes to the wrong people. A man's prejudices cling to the end. A man on his death-bed may repent his sins, he cannot reform his character or his opinions. If he has been a fool before, he will be a fool then."

"One trusts not," said Mr. Waterlane, in a sympathetic voice.

"I admit," said Mr. Mortlake dryly, "that he will not be aware of it. Don't be mournful, Waterlane. I am not feeling repentant or anything calculated to distress you. I am only making it clear that I have my prejudices like any other man, and that they are likely to reveal themselves in the making of my will. If you could tell me how to avoid being prejudiced——?"

"True, true," said Mr. Waterlane. "Yet there are always ways. Bequests to charity, for instance."

"Charity! What is modern charity? A system by which humbugging officials fatten on the business of pauperising their fellow-creatures. Don't shake your head, Waterlane!" Mr. Mortlake continued so irately as to cause Mr. Waterlane—who had wagged

his head to indicate rather the melancholy induced in him by this statement than any idea of contradiction—to start suddenly. “It is so. You can’t deny it.”

Lest he should be supposed capable of denying anything in the presence of so resolute a client, Mr. Waterlane brought his neck to such a stiffness that it seemed made of cast-iron. “No, no, of course not,” he said.

“But surely it is a most sweeping statement,” said Illingborough, who had been thinking.

Mr. Mortlake gave him a look of surprise.

“I like sweeping statements,” he said curtly.

“Still it does not make them any the truer,” said Illingborough.

“But then you see, Illingborough,” began Mr. Waterlane, in considerable anxiety.

“Oblige me by holding your tongue, Waterlane,” said Mr. Mortlake despotically. “Mr. Illingborough is perfectly right, which you wouldn’t be if you talked for a month. At the same time, Mr. Illingborough, my statement is sufficiently true in my estimation to prevent me from thinking of leaving anything to charity. It would be only wasting your time to no purpose or I’d let you talk. I’d better get to the point. Apart from a few legacies to servants which I should propose to base on a percent-

age of salaries and years of service, I intend to leave my money to one of my nieces."

Mr. Waterlane smiled. The will would not be so eccentric then.

"The lady young will be one of the richest heiresses in England," he said, with an almost religious fervour.

"And a prey to adventurers," said Mr. Mortlake. "It is to select this unfortunate young woman, Mr. Illingborough, that I want your help."

"To select her?" Illingborough did not understand.

"Select her out of a family of three sisters," explained Mr. Mortlake. "My prejudice favours a relative; my conscience—or whatever you choose to call it—prompts me to leave it to my most worthy relative. Unfortunately, I don't know my nieces. Years ago I quarrelled with their father, my brother-in-law, a fool. I haven't seen them since. They were in pinafores then. At present, I imagine, they are, in their own opinion, grown up or very nearly so."

"In that case——" began Illingborough.

"I could make my own selection by seeing them? I don't want to. Prejudice would only work further. That is what I wish to avoid."

"But," Illingborough began again, "surely Mr. Waterlane must have explained to you the one inevitable difficulty. It seems to me there must be

many others, but the main one is that a lawyer may not advise in the making of a will."

"Exactly what I told Mr. Mortlake," said Mr. Waterlane. "It is a matter not only of professional etiquette, but of obvious equity. If a solicitor——"

"Quite so," said Mr. Mortlake. "I remember your statements, Waterlane, and your assurance that Mr. Illingborough would confirm you in them. If he does—and I hoped he would not——"

"I cannot avoid doing so," said Illingborough firmly.

"Then I have thought of another plan," said Mr. Mortlake. "I am not a solicitor myself, but it seems to me I can see a way through professional etiquette. It is this—I ask you to forget entirely what I have just said. I state to you in Mr. Waterlane's presence that I do not wish to make my will. In all probability I shall call in another firm to assist me when I do. But what I do ask you to oblige me in doing is to go down to my brother-in-law's, stay there for, let us suppose, a month, and at the end of that time forward me the name of the most pleasant or most worthy or, briefly, most satisfactory of my nieces, in order that I may—let us again suppose—invite her to pay me a visit——"

The old man looked at Illingborough and Illingborough looked across at Mr. Waterlane. Mr. Waterlane looked at the ceiling.

"It seems a curious commission," said Illingborough, seeing no help from his partner. "After what you have said, I'm afraid——"

"Wait!" said Mr. Mortlake. "In the first place, nobody but you and Waterlane have heard my first proposal. In the second, I have asked you to forget it. In the third, I deny that it has any connection with the proposal now before you. Fourthly and lastly, without wishing to appeal to sentiment, you will be disobliging an old man who has not long to live if you refuse." He smiled a curious grim smile as he spoke.

Mr. Waterlane was moved.

"Certainly this proposal appears very different to the first one," he said.

"I don't like it," said Illingborough. Mr. Mortlake's denial had not impressed him. He hardly knew if it were meant to. "It is not a solicitor's business," he added.

"Family solicitors," said Mr. Waterlane dubiously, "have before now rendered services not dissimilar."

"You hear your senior partner!" said Mr. Mortlake. "Surely eccentric old men may sometimes be humoured—at—is it ten-and-six an hour? I confess," he added politely, "that it is not a service that can be paid for in money."

"But in any case," said Illingborough, struggling

against his distaste, "how could one ever be in a position to give the opinion you require?"

"That is simple enough," said Mr. Mortlake. He put his hand on a newspaper cutting that lay on a small table beside him. "If you will look at that you will see how to manage."

Illingborough took the cutting. It was an advertisement for a paying guest. It stated that the Misses Wetherborne would receive into the Sea House a gentleman desirous of bracing air and country life. Their terms would be four guineas a week, and references would be given and required.

"It was that advertisement," said Mr. Mortlake, "that partly gave me idea of getting an opinion on my nieces. It's not the first time I've seen it in the *Morning Post*, though I doubt if any man has been simple enough to pay four guineas a week for the sort of entertainment they can give him. However, it makes my plan feasible."

"You propose that I should go down there?" asked Illingborough.

"As any other paying guest might—yes—for a month," said Mr. Mortlake. "I think I can give you a month."

"Without indicating my reasons?" Illingborough asked.

"You don't know them—I mean," Mr. Mortlake

corrected himself, "just as you please. Inform them that you are to select one of them for the pleasure of a visit to their uncle if you think it would enliven your own visit to them. I should not do so myself."

Illingborough reflected.

"It seems unfair for a person like myself, who is particularly stupid at knowing what people are like, to arbitrate on—on——" he paused.

"On a small point like that?" said Mr. Mortlake. "Would Waterlane, do you think, do better?"

"No, no," said that gentleman.

"You'll have to go, if Mr. Illingborough won't," said Mr. Mortlake despotically. "Come now——"

"I think you might go, Illingborough," said Mr. Waterlane.

Illingborough made a last effort.

"I would rather not," he said; "I should certainly make a mistake."

"I shall trust you entirely," said the old man.

"It's most awfully kind of you to do so," said Illingborough. "But I don't see why you should."

Mr. Mortlake looked at him with something approaching a smile.

"Put it down to eccentricity in me," he said, "or to your own powers of looking sagacious. As you please. It's settled, is it?"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Waterlane. "I think it may be passed at that."

"If you wish it," said Illingborough, "though——"

"Right!" interrupted Mr. Mortlake, holding out his hand in the evident fear that Illingborough would proceed upon further passages of self-depreciation. "I won't detain you then. You'll apply for the post of guest and go down as soon as possible. All success to you. One moment, Waterlane," he added, as that gentleman was about to leave with his partner.

Illingborough took the hint and left the two alone.

"I only wanted," said Mr. Mortlake, "to congratulate you upon showing me an honest lawyer!"

Mr. Waterlane smiled. He took a good deal of the credit to himself for having been able to please so difficult and old a client.

"I believe that you will find Illingborough all that you think," he said. "I feel sure the young ladies will be fairly treated, and the right one selected for the visit. I am glad that you gave up your first idea."

"Oh!" said Mr. Mortlake.

"Yes, it wouldn't have done at all," said Mr. Waterlane. "I couldn't have advised Illingborough to such a breach. As it is, there is only one danger I foresee."

"What is that?" said Mr. Mortlake.

Mr. Waterlane smiled slyly.

"It may develop into a judgement of Paris," he said.

"I doubt it," said Mr. Mortlake. "And in any case it would still remain the judgement of Illingborough."

CHAPTER III

THE CANDIDATES FOR THE APPLE

ON the day on which Mr. Illingborough was due to arrive at the Sea House, the two eldest of the three Misses Wetherborne were seated in their own particular room. The view through the windows was of a wooded garden dropping to a little inlet of the sea. There were flowers in the garden as well as trees. The June sun struck down a path that for some distance was guarded with the white spikes of Madonna lilies and clumps of turquoise delphiniums, then turned and pierced a hedge of yellow roses and dipped quickly to the blue green of the bay. It was the smallest of bays shut in by heads of rock—steep but not frowning—and on this still morning (what with the trees and flowers overgrowing it) it suggested a piece of a mountain lake rather than the sea.

The room was less immune from criticism than the view from it. Its arrangements would not have satisfied the eyes of a strict housekeeper. It was untidy—even extremely untidy. The floor served

not only the usual purposes of a floor, but also those of a bookshelf, a table, and a cupboard. Not that those articles of furniture were wanting. At the back of the room there was a large oak bookshelf containing among other things several hats, a bottle of gum, and some parcels. A glass-fronted cabinet to the right—which had the glass and the hinge of the door broken—was stuffed with clothes in need of mending, old magazines, and a pair of waders. The table in the centre, though at times it was used for writing at, as was evident from the ink spots upon it, served at the moment to support a sewing machine and Miss Anne Wetherborne.

She sat on the edge of it, booted and spurred. Her right hand turned the handle of the sewing machine, strongly but not ungracefully, while her left guided the strip of pink silk under the bobbing needle. It was not perhaps the most suitable position for a machinist, but the stuff controlled by her lithe hand ran under the needle straight enough, and there was no zigzag in the stitching.

She was a slim girl. Her habit in spite of its worn appearance emphasised the slimness. Her light brown hair, tied up in a broad flap behind, came rather low on to her brows, which were at present knitted to a frown. The frown, which only dared the needle to go wrong, was withdrawn, as the hem

ran to the end of the silk ; the large grey eyes relaxed ; and her lips curved to a smile.

“ There, lazy beast,” she said amiably, tossing the stuff across to her sister.

“ How can you, Anne ! ”

“ Do it so quick ? Because I’m a jolly good sewing woman.”

“ I meant—use those vulgar expressions. They come so incongruously from a young gentlewoman.”

“ O Lord, is that what I am ? ” said Anne.

She sat there on the table dangling her legs and surveyed her sister with a tolerant smile. It was Jocelyne’s way to repose gracefully in a chair and to reprove her sister for saying and doing untoward things. Anne did so many things that some of them were bound to be untoward, and she did not in the least mind Jocelyne’s calling attention to them. Indeed, she rather liked to hear her criticisms. They showed Jocelyne active, Jocelyne in her humour ; when Jocelyne was not criticising, she was so often merely listless and peevish.

No one would have guessed that in looking at her. She was a beautiful girl. Both Mr. Wetherborne’s elder daughters were that, but Jocelyne had the start by a year (being twenty to Anne’s bare nineteen) in the race towards adolescent beauty. She had grown to a rounded completeness, which Anne still

lacked. She was Anne finished; Anne in flower. Or perhaps that metaphor is faulty, inasmuch that, for all their likeness, Jocelyne was far more to be compared with flowers than Anne was. She was built in the more flowery style. You looked more to her for colour and less for form. If she was the flower, Anne was rather some young tree—firmer growing than any flower, and showing no promise of drooping a little, as Jocelyne might, with the weight of her beauty.

“ Was it a young gentlewoman you took me for ? ” Anne repeated as Jocelyne scrutinised the pink silk without at first replying.

“ Yes,” said Jocelyne. “ But I’m sometimes afraid that other people won’t recognise it.”

“ Horrid loss for them.”

“ Only yesterday,” Jocelyne continued, “ Mrs. Watterly asked me if I didn’t think you were becoming a little wild.”

“ And did you ? ”

“ I didn’t say so to her,” said Jocelyne ; “ of course she’s a fussy prig. But I’m not at all sure she isn’t right about you.”

“ I don’t care, my dearest,” said Anne, “ if she is.”

“ I do,” said Jocelyne.

“ Why ? ”

“ Because she represents lots of other people.”

Anne tapped her foot against the leg of the table and whistled blithely.

" Bother the lots of other people," she said.

" Oh, you talk like that," said Jocelyne impatiently, " but you don't realise what it means. Supposing, for instance, when this Mr. Illingborough comes——"

" Bother him particularly," said Anne; " I wish he wasn't coming."

" So do I, of course," said Jocelyne.

Anne opened her eyes.

" What on earth is he coming for then ? " she demanded. " I thought it was just to amuse you."

" Certainly not."

" Oh, I see. Mr. Clifford has made him unnecessary."

Jocelyne flushed slightly.

" You know very well, Anne," she said, " that the idea of having a paying guest——"

" Lodger ! "

" Paying guest—sprang from motives of economy. We need some money. But it is also true that we don't see many people, and I thought that if somebody awfully nice did turn up, it might be a chance for you."

" Jos ! "

" Don't," said Jocelyne, who hated that corruption of her name.

"Well, then, say you never thought of such a thing."

"Oh, of course, everything I do is for selfish motives."

"But tell me such a horrible idea never entered your head."

"I see nothing horrible in it. It's all very well for you to go galloping about the country on horse-back all day, seeing nobody and shocking everybody who sees you. But what is to be the end of it?"

"What do you mean? Who wants an end?"

"I mean, supposing anything happens to father? Or even if it doesn't?" Jocelyne sat up in her chair quite energetically. "You know very well he is living on what's left of mother's money, and it's constantly getting less and less. Soon it'll come to an end, and then where shall we be? We're uneducated, friendless, and incompetent to do anything that ordinary people can do."

"I can groom a horse," said Anne.

"Absurd!" Jocelyne frowned with annoyance. "Who's going to have a girl as groom? You don't realise, Anne, how we're situated, or may be. You don't want to go into an almshouse like Mrs. Baggs and old Jane Cotter? Well, our only chance of not having to do that or something worse is to marry."

"Who are you going to marry?" said Anne.

"You don't show yourself any more sensible by talking like that," said Jocelyne. "I suppose you think it just comes to you—marriage. Comes to you—in a place like this! It doesn't. You might live here for fifty years and never be looked at."

"Mrs. Watterly seems to have noticed me."

"I'm talking of men. You needn't stare. It may not sound prim and proper to talk about whether there are any men to marry you. But if you don't, you'll be left in the lurch—you and Joan. I don't mean to be."

"I dare say I shall marry some day," said Anne casually, in the manner that most annoyed her sister.

"You won't," she retorted, "unless you make some effort to attract. It's very hateful, but we've got to find the men for ourselves. It's not our faults. If we had money, or a decent house or anything, they'd be after us like a shot—at least they would after me."

"Modesty!"

Jocelyne smiled a superior smile.

"My dear, I'm not a hypocrite," she said. "I know I'm good-looking. So are you, in rather a different way. We get it from father. About the only thing we are ever likely to get. It's our talent, and I'm not going to put mine in a napkin. I'm going to use it."

"Much better trust to luck," said Anne. She was

only vaguely conscious of what Jocelyne meant ; too vaguely even to be hurt by the idea. Inwardly she disapproved of—or rather scorned—some of the ways of attracting that Jocelyne had recently taken to—such as dressing up in cheap finery, going in to Porton Langley in high-heeled shoes, playing the fine lady to any one who would look her way or to her mirror if nobody would. But all these endeavours had been hitherto so unpractical, and Anne herself was so young that they had seemed to her nothing worse than stupid. She merely wondered what the fun could be of posing indoors before a glass, or walking about the High Street of Porton Langley in uncomfortable shoes, when one had the moors and sea at one's door, a boat to sail and a horse to ride. As for men, she had never met a man she wanted to talk to for more than a minute or two, unless it was Joe Harpington, blacksmith and farrier of Porton Langley, who could tell stories of racehorses for forty years back, and was an authority on ferrets. The young men who appealed to Jocelyne seemed to Anne particularly silly and disposed her to curtness.

“ Really I can't see any good being in a hurry,” she added, as these reflections came over her. “ But anyhow I hope to goodness you won't expect me to look after our lodger.”

“ Of course if you don't want to avail yourself of

what may be a splendid opportunity," said Jocelyne, "you needn't."

"I don't," said Anne.

"Then I shall offer it to Joan."

"Good luck to Joan!" said Anne. "But you know very well, Jos, you couldn't really leave a young man to anybody but yourself."

Indeed, Jocelyne showed no great anxiety to dispose of Mr. Illingborough when, a few minutes later, the door opened and her younger sister entered. It was Anne who made Joan the offer.

"Going—going—a young man, kid. What do you bid?"

"What do you mean?" said Joan. Two years younger than Anne, she looked quite as old when her hair was up, owing perhaps to her peculiarly bustling manner. Otherwise she was distinctly the least pleasing to look on of the sisters; of a tubby figure that might improve later on, and would bear improvement. Her manners were rough, and even the armful of flowers which she had brought in with her from the garden she seemed to carry not too tenderly. Indeed, no aspect of gentleness was suggested by Joan. She was essentially a busy bee, and people who emulate the bee are apt to lay too much stress on the buzzing capacity. In insects, their undoubted industry excuses—to a kindly philosopher—the con-

siderable noise they make about it, and he may reflect that it is the bee's misfortune to be born that way. In the human being buzzing is so unnatural that one cannot avoid suspecting that when so much energy is consumed in producing the sound of work, the just proportion is not employed on the work itself.

Perhaps the suspicion is unjustified. There still remains this much to be said against buzzing, that while it apparently soothes its insect inventors who must in some strange way be musical—lovers as it were of one another's tom-tomming—it irritates higher and more nervous creatures.

A human buzzer is almost invariably unpopular.

"What is all this about a young man!" demanded Joan, "and why is he going?"

"Mr. Illingborough," said Anne.

"I thought he was coming," said Joan, who was very literal.

"So he is," said Anne, "but in another sense he is going too—at least so Jos thinks."

"What sense?" asked Joan.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Jocelyne impatiently. "You're too young to understand. I was only asking Anne to try to behave decently to Mr. Illingborough. It's the least we can do to our guest."

"Certainly," said Joan, who had begun arranging

her flowers in large and ill-assorted bunches. "I wonder if he frets."

"I hope not," said Anne.

"Wood, I mean. Fretwood, you know, or any sort of carving. Because Odo Watterly has come, and if both he and Mr. Illingborough could carve a little, we might get something done to the rood-screen. The rector says if I can get it carved for nothing, I may."

"Sort of thank you for nothing," Anne suggested unkindly.

"Not at all," said Joan, with indignation. "There is no work more noble or less gratefully received than work done for the church."

"Oh, don't be an abominable little prig, for heaven's sake, Joan," said Jocelyne. Her young sister's recent development into a church worker—a development self-inspired and not altogether relished by the peaceful-minded rector, who found himself hustled from his accustomed ways by a tornado just out of the nursery—annoyed Jocelyne. For one thing it gave Joan a self-importance that a child had no business to affect; for another it was absurd. Jocelyne hated to be involved by her family in absurdities. "I suppose all this fussing," she went on, "is simply because Odo has come. Can't you let that poor youth alone?"

"Not in a church cause," said Joan, undeterred

by the charge of priggishness. "In other ways I can let youths alone better than you can, Jocelyne."

"I don't want any impudence," said Jocelyne, reddening at Anne's laughter.

"It isn't impudence," said Joan calmly. "I may tell you that spending one's time walking about with strangers like Mr. Clifford is not approved in a parish like ours. Mrs. Watterly says——"

"Hold your tongue!"

"That Lady Start very much disapproves of our taking paying guests at all," said Joan. "She thinks it unnecessary, and so do I."

"You are an unbearable little fool," said Jocelyne angrily, and Anne rocked with laughter. "And you had better leave the room."

"I was just going to, as you know," said Joan, moving towards the door. "I have promised to arrange these flowers in the church, and I should not like to disappoint the rector."

"Disappoint fiddlesticks," said Jocelyne, but Joan only gave her a superior smile as she went out.

"If Mr. Illingborough carves," she said, "I shall be able to give him some work."

Jocelyne sank back in her chair.

"What Joan wants," she said, "is a whipping. If she's going off to the church, it means she won't be back for lunch, and won't be able to drive the cart

to the station. I meant to send her to meet Mr. Illingborough. I can't go."

"Well, I don't want to," said Anne, "which I suppose amounts to the same thing. It'll do if we send Tom over, won't it?"

"I suppose so," said Jocelyne; "you might tell him not to be late."

"All right," said Anne.

CHAPTER IV

JOCELYNE PREPARES TO WIN

UNGRACIOUSNESS, which is the refusal to accept a kindness, is often far more vexatious than ingratitude, which is only the refusal to acknowledge it. For in the latter case the benefactor has at least the reward of feeling that he has done the kindly act. No failure on the part of the recipient can take away this feeling. But in the other case a benefactor must not only go unthanked but is also deprived of any comfortable certainty that he has done the right thing. He has, in fact, not even the satisfaction of feeling sure that he is a benefactor. The conduct of the other person amounts to the suggestion that he is not.

A reflection of this sort—unformulated but equally vexatious—accounted for the frown on Jocelyne's face as, an hour or two later, she strolled leisurely up the cliff path leading to Porton Langley. She was quite positive that Anne was ungracious not to be willing to appreciate in the smallest degree her resignation in Anne's favour of Mr. Illingborough as a

potential admirer. It was true perhaps that she had not—to begin with—planned to have a paying guest solely with a view to Anne's interest. Mr. Clifford had not swum into her ken at that date. Therefore it was possible that she had thought it would be amusing for herself as well as for Anne to have the society of a young man.

But since Mr. Clifford had turned up, since as a consequence Mr. Illingborough's presence would be for Jocelyne a trial rather than otherwise, what could be more disagreeable than Anne's desire to wash her hands of him? It was pretty certain the young man would want some attention, or he was not likely to stay long. As far as his society went, Jocelyne no longer cared. She did not want it, even if he turned out to be pleasant, and there was a risk that he might not. But she did want four guineas a week, particularly now that the summer was coming on, and one had to be decently clothed, and she had contracted with the Misses Job for two new dresses.

Besides, what she had been saying to Anne about the future was all eminently true and important. At one time or another they must marry, and the chances in marriage are—the sooner the better. Of course Mr. Illingborough, of whom they knew nothing as yet, might not fancy Anne. If he were a man of critical taste and had the entree to London society, if,

in fact, he bore any resemblance to Mr. Clifford, he was not likely to. Jocelyne had informed Anne of Mrs. Watterly's criticism, but it was really of Mr. Clifford's that she had been thinking. "Your helter-skelter sister," Mr. Clifford had called Anne. He and Jocelyne had been walking together at the time, and Anne had leapt her horse at a field-gate and almost come down on them before they saw her. What business had she to call down upon herself the epithet of helter-skelter? Jocelyne felt an added grievance against her when she thought of it. Anne had no dignity, not even a sense of propriety. That might be all very well if she were an only daughter and wanted to lead the sort of life she was leading now for ever, but she had no right to endanger her sisters' reputations. It did not much matter to Joan, who was quite insufferable anyhow, but it was a distinct injury to herself. Jocelyne blushed to think that she had a helter-skelter sister.

She had not at the time—a certain callowness is thereby indicated—questioned Mr. Clifford's right to refer to Anne as helter-skelter. A lady as lofty and unprovincial as Jocelyne conceived herself to be would have done so, and snubbed the critic even if she had admitted to herself the justice of the criticism. Jocelyne had merely coloured in a foolish way.

"I'm always trying to break Anne of it," she had said, with a smile that did not conceal her mortification. "I'm sure she does not get it from me."

"If she took after you," Mr. Clifford had answered, "she would be perfect."

Thereupon Jocelyne's smile had become radiant. Mr. Clifford's admiration was so unconcealed, and Mr. Clifford was one who knew.

The recollection of this, or perhaps the change from the steep climb up the cliffs to the cool walk on the tops of them, cleared away Jocelyne's vexation. After all, what did Anne's conduct matter, except to herself? It did not affect Jocelyne's status. No one would ever take her for helter-skelter. And when she had got those two dresses from the Misses Job!

The thought of the joys of being fitted lent lightness to Jocelyne's feet, and she tripped along the smooth turf almost regardless of the twinges her tight shoes gave her. One must suffer to enjoy. Jocelyne was enjoying by anticipation. She hardly noticed the mountain sheep dotted on the heathery cliffs, or the sea below, or the gulls wheeling white against the blue sky. Her mind's eye was upon the stuffy little room in which the Misses Job, with pins in their mouths and scissors in their fingers, would smooth and snip and bustle round her, as they tried on the

evening gown of the fashionable hue of Egyptian earth and the green Shantung tennis frock with a pin-tucked chemisette. So eager did Jocelyne become that she almost ran the last part of the way down the path leading into Porton Langley, and arrived in that little sea town quite unfashionably warm.

Mesdames Estelle, Modes et Robes, is written over a little red brick house in Wellington Street, which is perhaps the chief turning out of High Street; and the group of wax dahlias under a glass case in the window—the chief thing visible from the outside save the bamboo curtains—gives but little indication of the art evolved within. It was an art which astounded and delighted no one so much as its producers, who might in this respect be counted among the happiest of artistes. So indeed they were, more particularly Miss Amabelle Job, the younger of the two Mesdames Estelle. So also they had cause to be. For having, upon the death of their father—an ill-tempered, gruff little man, soured by the misfortunes that had attended his endeavours to sell candles, boots, acid drops, and other minor articles of grocery—started in the dressmaking line (at the suggestion of the rector's wife, who pointed out that they must now earn their own living, that Miss Amabelle had once taken a prize at the church school for sewing, and that Miss Jane had an organising capacity

which would always come in handy, and that small dressmakers who would be thankful to do little jobs carefully might count on support)—having started in this modest way—the sisters had risen by slow degrees to be practically *the* modistes of the place. This was due partly to industry and enthusiasm, partly to luck. For example, Madame Langley, who had been the gown expert when they began, had died, leaving all she possessed to her nephew, who not being a Worth had allowed the business to vanish. Then again, a French woman, who had introduced Parisian fashions into Porton Langley, had been impeded in her undoubted capacity by a love of English liquors, which shocked clients. It was rumoured that Mrs. Maine, the rector's wife, had gone to be fitted during one of Madame Philippe's bouts, and had had to rush from the room only partly dressed in order to avoid being made into a pin-cushion. Upon Madame Philippe's departure, taken on a stretcher, the Misses Job had added French to their other and more local modes. They had ended by being practically forced—in mere justice to their own skill—to adopt the title of Mesdames Estelle, with all that that implied. Thus from binding skirts for the fishers' wives and cutting out, simply and squarely, the roomy knicker-bockers of the small boys of the idler inhabitants, they had attained the peaks of dressmaking. Mrs. Maine, who had once

sent things to be mended, now had everything made there, and she was but one of many gentlefolk. Fashion plates and magazines embodying the latest creations were subscribed for by the Mesdames Estelle, and from them Miss Amabelle Job, whose romantic tastes were backed by a really shrewd observation, evolved her own often astonishing adaptations. She had that passion for something new that is of the essence of a dressmaker. Novelties thrilled her, and if she was sometimes shocked by some of the fashions that came from Paris, she could always tone them down before reproducing them.

Meanwhile Miss Jane kept the books, and was a severe critic of misfits. She saw that hooks were sewn on properly, and that Miss Amabelle was not led away into extravagances of style. "Fits before flounces" was one of her mottoes. "Quarterly payments" was another.

It was in reference to this latter maxim that Miss Wetherborne, a little previous to her arrival, had formed the subject of a discussion between the Mesdames Estelle. "Choice, isn't it?" Miss Amabelle had asked, holding up the pin-tucked chemisette she had got out against Jocelyne's arrival.

"Too choice," said Miss Job. "I don't hold it's worth making things for her." She was a small

tight-set person, in sharp contrast to her large and drooping sister. Her mouth was particularly prim. "I don't trust that Miss Wetherborne," she continued.

"She has a sweet figure," said Miss Amabelle, filling her mouth with pins so as to be ready.

"And a sweet bill she would run up, if allowed. The same as Mr. Wetherborne does—so all the tradespeople say."

"But it's only the two dresses she's ordered," pleaded her sister. "And the Shantung'll be a picture on her."

"Pictures aren't payers," said Miss Job. "What's more, I don't care for pictures that give themselves airs, as though they were the ladies of the land, when everybody knows the contrary. However, as you took on the work, I suppose it'll have to be done. Only no more before she settles."

"She will," said Miss Amabelle, with conviction. "They've got a paying guest coming to them—so the butcher was telling me—a gentleman from London. Who knows what that mayn't lead to?"

Miss Job snorted slightly.

"London gentlemen aren't so romantic as you, Am. 'What's the dot?' that's their first question, and I don't blame them, when they can see for themselves that it'll be bills, bills, bills all the time. What's more, gentlemen from London don't care for other

gentlemen from Lord knows where walking their young ladies out ahead of them."

"You mean that he won't like the gentleman at the Frigate—Mr.—Mr.——"

"Clifford," supplied Miss Job.

"Being so friendly with her already?"

"That's what I do mean," said Miss Job. "It's fast. That's what that is, and I dare say I'm not the only one to think it."

"It comes maybe from her being orphaned," said Miss Amabelle charitably, "and no mother to look after her."

"We are orphans," said Miss Job; "I am not aware that we have ever caused any talk."

Miss Amabelle sighed. She could not view the escapades of youth and beauty with quite her sister's coldness. Often, reading the serial stories that ran through the fashion papers, she had lived through dashing experiences that seemed almost real, and felt the feverish joy of being in fancy a giddy heroine or even a wicked but smart countess. But she could not tell Jane this.

"It's true she's wildish," she said, "but I think you're wrong in thinking she won't pay. And even if she don't, Miss Anne'll see to it."

"She may," Miss Job allowed.

"What a pity she don't get something herself,"

said Miss Amabelle, encouraged by this confession. "I'd love to gown Miss Anne. She hasn't Miss Wetherborne's roundness, but she's more svelty."

"She's more honest," said Miss Job, "and knows she can't afford it."

"Not now perhaps. But who knows? The gentleman might see in her his fancy's all," said Miss Amabelle. "You never can say what'll happen, Jane. Look what a lot Lady Start thinks of Miss Anne. And her ladyship's nephew, the captain, is coming down again soon I hear. If she were to marry into the county, her custom would be valuable."

"You can make for her when she does," said Miss Job.

But though her sister's arguments had not convinced, they had to some extent conciliated her; and Jocelyne, when she was shown into the little room, received the attention due to a client in spite of what Miss Job called her airs. These, though not unnatural to Jocelyne, were somewhat emphasised by the consciousness that Miss Job was, as Jocelyne phrased it to herself, a grasping old creature. The thought embittered a little even the sweets of being fitted. How Jocelyne would have liked to arrive there as an heiress! She would have loved to be thought capable of ordering a hundred dresses instead of only trying on two. Still, when the Shantung

was on, and Miss Amabelle, with a thousand pins in her mouth, flowed about her, while Miss Job stood at gaze, scissors in hand, like a fate, other troubles could be forgotten. Viewing herself in the pier-glass, Jocelyne's face beamed, and she forgot her airs.

"Oh, it's lovely!" she said, "especially the skirt."

"Semi-directoire," explained Miss Amabelle. "It is a sweet fashion—and so becoming to you, Miss."

"Isn't it?" said Jocelyne. "And now, when can I have it, Miss Job?"

"When did you want it, Miss."

"As soon as possible. I am particularly short of frocks at present. I was thinking of getting you to make me another——"

Miss Job's face stiffened, and Jocelyne went on hastily, "but I shan't bother about that now. Only, I must have these by Tuesday. There are so many things on—garden parties—including Lady Start's."

"Of course, Miss," said Miss Amabelle, "it shan't be a day later."

"Very well," said Jocelyne, "you can send it by the carrier."

She tripped out of the house in high spirits, in spite of the fact that Miss Job's face had vetoed the third frock. Sufficient for the day would be the Shantung and the Egyptian earth. She walked down Wellington Street at a great pace, and then

turned slowly on to the Parade that was the glory or the shame of Porton Langley, according to whether you regarded it from the point of view of the tradespeople or the county. It was meant to bring tourists, and did so, but not at this time of the year.

Indeed, it was almost deserted. A couple of nurses with perambulators were visible in the distance ; on the beach below a fisherman was painting his boat. Otherwise the only person at hand was a tall man in riding attire lounging near one of the shelters. He saw Jocelyne and came towards her so quickly that she had no time to turn and walk the other way on the pretence that she had not noticed him, as her coyness might have tempted her to do. Instead, she stopped and put up her sunshade, well pleased to see him in a hurry.

" I hope I'm not late, Mr. Clifford," she said, as he came up and saluted her.

CHAPTER V

A DROPPED HANDKERCHIEF

IF promptness at a fateful moment combined with a considerable knowledge of the weaknesses of human nature could command success, Mr. James Clifford was in a fair way to obtain it. In the meantime he was enjoying his holiday, and beginning to take quite a pride in his name.

It was just a week since—as James Beaver—he had sat in the little room adjoining Mr. Mortlake's library and listened to the conversation in which his employer had revealed his intentions concerning the disposition of his great riches. No one had suspected Beaver's presence there, and still less did any one suspect Clifford's possession of Mr. Mortlake's secret. He had gone out of the room undisturbed, and had even accomplished a certain amount of indexing in the course of the half-hour that had intervened between the lawyers' departure and Mr. Mortlake's message to him to say that he could return to the library. But in that half-hour he had also resolved on a plan of action.

It was almost instinctive—the resolution to make something out of his secret, and minimise as far as possible the loss that would undoubtedly occur to him when Mr. Mortlake's death—about which the old man seemed almost indecently positive—should relieve him of his secretarial duties. Beaver knew from experience that secretarial posts, little profitable as they are, are not so easily obtained. He had got his present one by a stroke of luck, an old friend of his father's having been acquainted with Mr. Mortlake's need of an assistant, as well as with Mr. Mortlake himself. This paternal acquaintance had recommended Beaver chiefly to escape his importunities, and had very plainly intimated that it was the last service that he intended to do to his old friend's son, whom—as he frankly stated—he had helped before without any one being thankful to him for it.

Two points therefore were clear—one that he would be out of a post very shortly, the other that his labours at that post would be unrewarded except by the meagre salary he received and the contemptible percentage on it which Mr. Mortlake intended to leave him. Beaver had worked out that percentage to a ten-pound note.

A ten-pound note for giving the best of his youth to the depressing toil of indexing a work on scarabs ! If anything were needed to stimulate his zeal in

pursuing his secret to a profitable end, the thought of that ten-pound note would have sufficed. Nothing was needed. The curious discussion of the will had excited him sufficiently. He had thought that out too, in all its possibilities. In effect, they amounted to this. A girl—one of three living in an out-of-the-way seaside country—was, unknown to herself, to inherit a great fortune. He knew Mr. Mortlake's ways and tones too well to suppose that his second proposal meant anything different from his first. The lawyers might be deceived, but not he. This girl would be "a prey to every adventurer"—Mr. Mortlake had said; and he had spoken truly, always supposing her affections were disengaged up to the time she inherited. But supposing they were not? Supposing a young man, good-looking, presentable, intelligent, one moreover not ignorant of the ways of women, were to anticipate that golden period? Could he not, having the advantages of knowing the event, step in quickly and keep out the others? Marriage—an estate which, in spite of the cynics, has its advantages, particularly when it is golden lined—had no terrors for Beaver. He had indeed often thought of it as a profession, and in imagination had seen himself rather comfortably suited with the post of a well-to-do family man. The idea of ownership which should include a house, a motor, servants, a banking account,

and incidentally a wife, appealed to him. These things give a man a certain position and a good deal of solace. The wife may be a mistake. In that case one solaces oneself with the house, the motor, the cheque-book and all that that can purchase, and leaves her to be a "mistake" in her own society. Beaver would not miss her.

The problem was how to gain her in the first instance. The most striking obstacle on the road to success was the impossibility of knowing beforehand which of the three girls would be Illingborough's selection. It would not do to be engaged—perhaps married—to one, and then find another romp in an easy winner. By this difficulty a man of common intelligence would have found himself stumped; and even Beaver desponded for a little, but not for long. Obviously the thing to do was to establish himself in the graces of the family, make himself popular, keep a watchful eye for Illingborough's decision, and at the right moment propose. The right moment would be that at which, while Illingborough had made up his mind, the girl was still in ignorance of her prospects, and would welcome the devotion of an independent, delightful, and apparently wealthy admirer.

There were plenty of other difficulties in the way if Beaver wanted to look for them. Illingborough's

decision, for example, might not become Beaver's property in time. The girl might change her mind about Beaver when she know her prospects. She might already be engaged. Beaver set all these aside and dealt only with the practical difficulty. That consisted of the shortness of the time he would have at his disposal, and he partly solved it by presenting himself to Mr. Mortlake—on the morning following his acquisition of the secret—with a request for leave of absence. He based his request on the ground of ill-health.

“What does your doctor say is the matter?” Mr. Mortlake had asked.

“I'm ashamed to say it's a threatening of nervous breakdown.”

He would not have been ashamed to say it even if it had been true, and as it was a lie, he was rather pleased with it.

“Dear me,” said Mr. Mortlake briefly,—“it's going to be temporary, I hope?”

“Oh yes,” said Beaver hastily, “the only thing is to take it in time. I am awfully distressed at the inconvenience it will cause you.”

“Not at all.”

“But a rest is imperative.”

“You must have the rest, of course.”

“I am much obliged to you, sir.”

“How long do you require, and where are you going?”

“The doctor advised a sea voyage. I thought of going to Madeira and back.”

“Couldn’t do better, I should imagine,” said Mr. Mortlake. “And I suppose you would like to start at once? Well, there’s nothing very pressing to be done here. I expect you will find a month’s salary in advance useful.”

“Thank you,” murmured Beaver.

The same day he was in Porton Langley, with the assurance that he had some days’ start of Illingborough, between whom and the Misses Wetherborne letters and references would have to be exchanged, while he himself was making their acquaintance and creating favourable impressions. As James Clifford—he had adopted that name in the train—he felt pretty certain that no rumour of his presence in that part of the world would come to Mr. Mortlake’s ears. It was true that Illingborough, if they met, would recognise him as the Beaver of their school days, but that would not matter. Beaver had a story ready to account for his change of name, and Illingborough would not be aware that Mr. Mortlake had a secretary named Beaver, now supposed to be on his way to Madeira. Illingborough would only be rather pleased to see an old schoolfellow, and not at all curious to know

why he was there. He had never been in the least inquisitive.

Still, Beaver was ready to explain his presence also, if necessary. He had come down—he was prepared to say—partly for the sea air, partly to acquaint himself with the country where he intended to hunt later. He also intended to put in a little time with the otter hounds.

He practised this tale on the landlord of the Frigate hotel, in which, understanding it to be the headquarters of the hunting men, he took rooms. The landlord accepted it willingly enough, being pleased perhaps to have a guest in the slack season, and Clifford—as he now was, having signed himself to that effect in the visitors' book—set about to make the Misses Wetherbornes' acquaintance. That he could be assiduous, once he had made up his mind to a thing, was proved by the fact that he did not neglect his purpose in spite of the charms of the barmaid of the Frigate—Miss Maine—a young lady with a good deal of colour, who went the length of taking her hair out of curl papers a couple of hours earlier than usual in the day in order to attract Mr. Clifford.

Chance decided that Jocelyne should be the sister with whom he should inaugurate the desired acquaintance, and that no later than the day after he had arrived at the Frigate. He had ascertained that

Mr. Wetherborne often dropped in to the hotel to lunch and see the papers, and he had intended to approach him, if necessary.

Meeting Jocelyne was even better luck.

That came about, as has been said, the morning after Clifford's arrival, when he was taking his first stroll through the streets. The streets were dull. It was not yet Porton Langley's season. The shops were open, of course, but no one seemed to be shopping. An errand boy or two with a basket went past sleepily, and a fruiterer drove along with his cart. Otherwise, the place might have been dead.

The girl under the pink parasol was an oasis in a desert of dullness to Clifford ; and if he had known it, he was the same to her. All he knew was that directly after she had passed him, she dropped her handkerchief. Chance has been given the credit of sending Jocelyne to Porton Langley, where, it is true, her visits, though frequent, were irregular. It was not chance that caused her to drop her handkerchief, though it had the appearance of chance. People do drop their handkerchiefs by chance, and if a lady drops hers and walks on without noticing it, who is to prove, or even to suppose, that it was done on purpose ? Nobody. Jocelyne knew that from experience. For it was not the first time that she had adopted this simple means of satisfying her curiosity.

Some people would call it an unladylike curiosity, others a romantic one. Jocelyne herself, who, like Miss Amabelle Job, was a great reader of novelettes, knew that it was a possible method of setting in motion the most delightful and mysterious happenings.

There are many methods. You turn a corner or step into a cab, lose your parasol or twist your ankle—instantly you may become the heroine destined to attract a handsome young man, who may temporarily have fallen upon dark days and desperate disguises, but is pretty certain to turn out brave, devoted, and—as likely as not—the son of an earl. Miss Job, charmed by these wonders, was content to enjoy them in print and in fancy. Jocelyne had a more practical mind. She knew herself to have all the exterior qualities of the heroine—down to the golden hair and grey eyes—why then, if dropping a handkerchief will bring up the hero and the adventures, not do so? She had dropped it once or twice before without anything very remarkable happening. On one occasion a small urchin had picked it up and wanted a penny for finding it. On another the wheel of a dust-cart had gone over it, and it was too dirty to pick up. But one never knows. Here was another chance. If he saw it and rescued it and brought it back to her, at least the handkerchief would have served to give her a good look at this stranger, who

must—since she didn't recognise his face—be a new-comer to Porton Langley.

The trick worked. Quite innocent of the fact that he was obeying her whim, Clifford, who had turned to stare after her, saw the handkerchief fall, and hastened to restore it to its owner. Jocelyne, who had carefully stopped at a shop window a little farther on, in case he should be one of those bashful men who would not care for a regular stern chase, heard him say—

“ I beg your pardon, but is this your handkerchief ? ”

She turned round quickly.

“ Oh, I must have dropped it. Thank you so much,” she said, with a gracious smile ; “ how stupid of me.”

“ They're the sort of things that do get lost,” said Clifford.

“ Only if one's careless,” she replied.

“ I think you're very hard on yourself.”

“ Oh no. But many thanks all the same ” ; she bowed slightly and walked on. In the books she had been thinking of some lucky word would have set them on the required footing of friendliness and led on to easy and intimate conversation. Real life is absurdly stiff, conventional, and neglectful of its opportunities. But though she felt this, Jocelyne had far too much sense to remain talking with a man who had merely

picked up her handkerchief for her. That, she knew, would be to make herself cheap. Whereas now, as she walked off, he was probably looking after her, and wondering who that lovely dignified girl could be.

So for a moment he had wondered, but he had also, a few minutes later, entirely forgotten Jocelyne in the pleasure of chatting with Miss Maine in the bar of the Frigate, while he drank a whisky and soda she had just brought him. But that Jocelyne recalled herself to him by passing in front of the window a moment later, Clifford would never have asked Miss Maine who she was.

"Wetherborne's her name," said the bar lady, with a sniff.

"What name did you say?" He could hardly believe his luck.

"Miss Wetherborne. Peacocking round as usual."

"She's a jolly pretty girl," said Clifford, to excuse his now strong interest.

"Think so?"

"Don't you?"

"Don't care for the style myself," said Miss Maine. Too countrified. Going to chase after her to Mazinghope?" she added, seeing him rise and put down his glass.

"Where's that?" said Clifford.

"Where they live. They've got a house on the cliffs there."

Clifford lingered a few minutes to prevent the idea that he was going in pursuit remaining in Miss Maine's mind; then sallied out and inquired for the road to Mazinghope. The road went along the cliffs, it seemed, and presently ahead of him the pink parasol became visible. He caught it up easily enough, and when he was level with it lifted his hat.

"It's rather like wanting a return for the very small service I was able to do you," he said, "but could you tell me the way to Mazinghope?"

"It's straight on from here," said Jocelyne. "I'm just going there."

"Ought I to walk the other side of the road?" he asked, with a gay politeness, and since she only smiled, took it for granted that he need not. They walked on together, and he explained that he had heard of the charms of Mazinghope as a sequestered village, and wondered if he could get lodgings there. Jocelyne was doubtful about that, but would not discourage him from trying. The walk ended with an introduction to Mr. Wetherborne, whom they met just outside his house, and an invitation to tea, which was the result of Mr. Clifford's instantly taking Mr. Wetherborne's word for it that no lodgings could possibly be had at Mazinghope. That was the sort

of young man Mr. Wetherborne liked—a young man who did not argue and bother, and listened to a good deal of tedious information—delivered in a monotonous voice—with what appeared to be great interest. Mr. Wetherborne did not want to examine a person's testimonials. He knew a gentleman when he saw him. He also knew that a stranger to his anecdotes was a person not often met with in those parts, and one to be taken advantage of accordingly.

Mr. Clifford stayed for quite a long time, and got on so well that he was able to say to Jocelyne as they parted that he had never been so grateful to anything as to her dropped handkerchief.

Jocelyne smiled. It is cruel to damp a man's faith for the sake of being stupidly candid, so she did not mention that she had dropped it on purpose.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE AND MR. CLIFFORD

LOVE is a kind of deceit. Man—a good-humoured creature full of vanities, appetites, and weaknesses—suddenly assumes the hero and gives forth, consciously or unconsciously, that he is gallant, tender, long-suffering, and capable of high and lifelong devotion to an ideal. That ideal, as he cannot now for a moment conceal, although he has never somehow noticed it before, he finds embodied in woman.

She, unaware apparently that she has any part in this quick-time elevation of a mole-hill into a mountain, allows him to suppose that women are indeed remote and lofty things—as it were stars, set so high up that they have hitherto ignored the world, stars nevertheless capable of being warmed into an extra refulgence by the sight, so entirely unexpected, of this very fine, distant, and respectful mountain peak.

That is love, or the prologue to it. A curious theme for poets to have sung (and other people not to

have laughed at) seeing that poets have in general such an appreciation of truth.

Yet one finds some excuse for love—even some fineness in it—when one comes across its shadow, when one sees the deceit not lived but acted, the cheat pretended, the illusion played with. The man or woman who pretends to be in love for the sake of some other end—these are the foils to the true knaves. For these hand over to destruction their one chance of being for a little the immortal creatures which all lovers by the intensity of their deception may become. They throw away the best of themselves—their illusions.

It seems, however, that a good deal of interest may be derived from observing the forms of the heroic hypocrite. Thus Clifford, posing as greatly attracted by Jocelyne, had passed an undeniably pleasant week, during which affairs had progressed to what might be called his heart's content, had his heart been concerned. Jocelyne made a very pretty candle for the moth he was pretending to be; and if they did not know each other well, it was not so much from lack of seeing one another, as from the fact that they were unavoidably acting to one another. Jocelyne's part was coyness, Clifford's that of ardour tempered by superiority. Now, as they met on the Parade and Jocelyne hoped that she was not late, he replied—

"That's a nice thing to say when a man's been waiting hours."

"Have you?" said Jocelyne, betrayed into a smile of pleasure.

"Of course."

"I'm sorry," said Jocelyne importantly, "but I had an appointment with my dressmakers. It always takes up time."

Perhaps Clifford had been waiting and was not pleased; or perhaps he was paying a compliment.

"I shouldn't have supposed you employed a local dressmaker," he said.

How easily the smallest cup of joy may be dashed from one's lips. Jocelyne had looked forward to telling him about that appointment with her dressmakers, and now she saw that it might involve an admission of provincialism.

"Oh, I don't get everything here, of course," she said hastily, and with much truth, for her clothes were mostly home made. "But one likes to encourage local talent," she added, trying to suppress the vision which would present itself of Miss Job's face stiffening at the suggestion of a third frock. She could have stamped with vexation at Clifford's cool tone.

"Local talent is all very well," he was saying. "But if I were a woman I should want to go to Paris for my things."

“Madame Estelle uses Parisian models, of course ; I insist on it,” said Jocelyne, but with no assurance of voice. Was it possible that Mr. Clifford, in spite of his obvious admiration, thought her dowdy ? “Let’s walk on if we’re going anywhere,” she added, to change the conversation.

They left the Parade and took a road that took them inland towards Mazinghope. Jocelyne had informed Mr. Clifford that a friend was arriving that day from London to stay with them. She must be back in time to greet him. She hinted that he was wealthy and delightful. Inwardly Clifford smiled, knowing the facts, but he was aware by now that she, like himself, attached great importance to money, and since this weakness, if it was a weakness, fitted in well with his plans, he was not disposed to discourage it. The more Jocelyne craved wealth, the readier she would be to adopt the means of obtaining it. The nature of the means was not yet clear to Clifford. He had begun to see that his first notion—that of making himself equally popular with all the three Misses Wetherborne’s—had been immature. It is much easier to be loved than to be popular. Even the Mormons must have discovered this. Popularity requires so much more time, so many more opportunities. And Clifford, while he had found time enough to cultivate Jocelyne, had found no time

at all to cultivate Anne or Joan. Anne was illusive—a female centaur, not to be impressed in a few moments by a man who wore riding breeches, but did not apparently ride. Again, Clifford's inability to fret had made him appear a mere nothing in the eyes of that juvenile Dorcas, Joan. It was an uncomfortable thought, but if either of the two younger sisters were to be chosen of Illingborough, Clifford's chances of sharing the spoil were small indeed. He might learn to fret or to ride, but it would be too late.

Apart from all this, his relations with Jocelyne were no longer the indefinite ones of popularity. Justifiably enough she imagined him to be in love with her, and she was, he took it, quite in love with him. This was satisfactory, in so far that she was the only one that he would care to marry for herself—in addition to her fortune. The simple addition was, however, a necessity.

Everything therefore depended upon whether Illingborough was likely to select her. Clifford felt that he himself would have done so—in any case, and regardless of the state of his affections—if he had been appointed judge, but that was no guarantee that Illingborough would do it. He had been a curious little fellow, and might be so still. Tricky thing—a conscience. In common with a good many people, Clifford regarded conscientiousness as a pig-

headed quality which makes its possessors act in a way nauseating and disadvantageous to the ordinary man who does not pretend to be a saint. Conscientious people are painfully apt to appear skeletons at a feast of the merry. But that is not to say that they do not, on the one hand, enjoy feasts of their own ; or, on the other, that they are ready to spoil their own pleasures as well as other people's. To look after one's self Clifford held to be the instinct as much of the conscientious as of the frivolous man. The way in which the rule would apply to this particular case was clear. Illingborough, however conscientious, would not hand over thousands of pounds to a young girl who was obviously tied to some third person.

Why should he ?

It followed that Clifford had gone too fast. He saw now that he should not have allowed himself to dally so conspicuously. It was flattering to know that his manner was irresistible, and that his triumph had been gained in a week, but it was also disconcerting. It made Jocelyne's attachment far too conspicuous under the circumstances.

How to accomplish a *volte face*—to retire without losing his advantages—to blow cold without risk of fanning the flame or, worse still, of putting it out, was the question that made him meditative on the walk along the high hedged lanes that led so circuitously

to Mazinghope. He was trying to estimate Jocelyne's character as it would reveal itself in this new turn of events. If only she could be trusted, it would be far simpler just to take her into his confidence, explain exactly how things stood, and leave it to her to attach Illingborough to her interests. If she knew Mr. Mortlake's intentions, she would have every advantage against her sisters and against Illingborough. It was not the fear that she would refrain from using her advantages against them that deterred Clifford from speaking openly to her. He was pretty sure somehow that Jocelyne would see no unfairness in that. What he feared was that she would use her advantages, if he gave them to her, against himself. Her ambitions were obvious. Viewing herself as an heiress, she might view him no longer as a desirable match, as the Prince Charming of her somewhat commonplace fairy tales, but as a second-rate adventurer, whom she would throw over without a pang. She would picture herself marrying into the peerage. Whether she dropped Clifford or not, she would most decidedly give herself airs. And he could not look forward to being patronised with any pleasure, even supposing patronage were to be the least of his sufferings.

Watching her sidelong eyes and affected walk—both of which he admired uneasily—he decided that it

would be wise to wait before he told her all ; and in the meantime to try in some way to prepare her to make Illingborough think well of her. He might as well begin by confessing that he had known Illingborough at school.

“ What did you say the name of your visitor was ? ” he inquired, coming out of his thoughts to find Jocelyne a little sulky at his unusual silence.

“ I said his name was Illingborough. But I didn’t know that you were listening to anything that I said.”

“ Of course I am,” said Clifford. “ Only the name struck me. I was wondering whether he could be the Illingborough I knew at school.”

“ Did you know one ? ”

“ Yes, rather a pleasant kid.”

“ How interesting,” said Jocelyne, yawning.

“ The funny thing is,” said Clifford, “ that if he’s the same he won’t recognise me under my present name.”

“ Why not ? ” asked Jocelyne, rising to this piece of information.

“ Because I only took it a few years ago on the death of an uncle. He left me his money on condition that I took his name.”

This was the story he had resolved to tell if explanation should be needed. Jocelyne accepted it readily enough.

"Why have you never told me?" she said; "I wish I had an uncle like that. I believe I have one, but I've never seen him. I fancy he quarrelled with father over something."

"Really?" said Clifford. It was the first reference to Mr. Mortlake he had heard from her. "Perhaps he'll end up by doing the same as mine."

"I wish he would," said Jocelyne. "I wouldn't mind changing my name a bit."

"It's awfully nice to hear you say that," he said sentimentally, and Jocelyne coloured and pretended to occupy herself in picking some ferns from the hedge-side. "I wonder," he went on, disappointingly abandoning this opening, "if your Illingborough can be the one I know."

"You seem extremely interested in him," said Jocelyne, pouting, "but he isn't my Illingborough, you know."

"Not yet," said Clifford.

"Is he so fearfully interesting?" she asked.

There was no invitation she was so ready to accept as the invitation to flirt, and he saw that this characteristic might be turned to his purpose.

"You might think so," he said, with an affectation of anxiety. "I don't. He used to be cleverish, fond of poetry and that sort of thing. Not my style."

"I shan't allow myself to be prejudiced against

him," said Jocelyne gaily. It was pleasant to see a hint of jealousy in Mr. Clifford. "I expect he is delightful."

"Of course you do," said Clifford. "It's just like a woman to expect that, and then say she is not prejudiced beforehand. I doubt if you'll get much out of him, though."

"What do you mean?"

"Queer sort—suspicious of lovely woman. I don't see him particularly easily netted—from what I remember."

It was in the nature of a challenge, and so, vaguely, Jocelyne understood it, though she misunderstood the motive underlying it.

"Do you mean that he's a woman-hater?" she asked naively.

Clifford laughed.

"Rather not," he said. "Put that idea into a woman's head, and she won't rest until the fellow's recanted. I only meant he wouldn't be very keen on being a lapdog, you know."

"He sounds most charming," said Jocelyne, with a conscious smile. "I wasn't particularly anxious to have him at the house, but after what you've said I shall be quite excited to see him."

"He'll prefer your sister Joan," said Clifford.

"Possibly," said Jocelyne.

“ And anyway, he mayn’t be the man I mean at all. I wish to goodness you weren’t going to have him.”

“ Why ? ”

Clifford’s endeavours to explain why—endeavours that sounded naturally confused owing to the cross purposes he was playing at—were just what Jocelyne delighted in. They made sheer pleasure of a walk which had opened dully enough, and she would have prolonged it (as she could have done by taking advantage of Clifford’s ignorance of the locality, to make a still farther detour than they had yet made), if it had not seemed to her more dexterous to appear anxious to be home in time for Mr. Illingborough’s arrival. Clifford, though for his part he feigned distress at the walk coming so quickly to an end, was not ill pleased to see Jocelyne turn off by a footpath through a cornfield, that avoided Mazinghope and led straight to the Sea House. Acting is always a laborious business, requiring long intervals. But the labour is much greater and the intervals more necessary when the actor has to invent his part and construct his scenery as he goes along, and knows, moreover, that receipts can be counted only when the play is over and depend for their smallest value on its complete success.

CHAPTER VII

ANNE ANADYOMENE

THE faculty of concentration, though it makes no doubt for success in the end, causes a man in the beginning to go slow. Fanciful and impressionable people can turn to a new thing at a moment's notice. They are transferring light weights. The conscientious man is apt to be a fixture, and has to uproot himself before he can move on his heavy way.

A week had elapsed between Illingborough's interview with Mr. Mortlake and his arrival at Porton Langley, and it had been spent vigorously enough in an attempt to drop the subject of the law in favour of woman, or, as perhaps it would be more accurate to say, the female intelligence, as adapted to the handling of wealth.

He could not rid himself of the notion that, ultimately, it was Mr. Mortlake's first proposal—and not only his second—upon which his decision was required. He earnestly hoped that this notion was a mistaken one. Mr. Waterlane maintained that

it was. Mr. Waterlane's view was that Illingborough had no right in any case to make such an assumption, and though Illingborough felt this to be casuistical, he deferred to Mr. Waterlane as an older and wiser man than himself. Nevertheless the possibility that his assumption was correct—which meant that he would be doing as a solicitor what as a solicitor he would not and should not wittingly do—had disturbed him a good deal.

His only consolation was the thought that the most suitable young woman to pay a visit to her uncle would also probably be his most suitable heir.

It was a compromise with his conscience, the best he could effect ; it did not in any case get him very far towards deciding what suitability in a woman was. He had managed, by much strenuous self-restraint, to banish considerations of leaseholds, rights of way, and such things from his brain, but he had not—and the thought worried him a good deal in the train that carried him westward—succeeded in filling the vacancy thereby created with any very satisfactory views as to Suitability in the Female.

It was a very wide subject of course. The poets, to whom he had gone for information, having a great reverence for them, were not minutely helpful upon it. Indeed, it is doubtful if they helped at all. One

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could disregard the superficiality contained in such lines as—

“O Woman, in thine hour of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please”;

or

“What mighty ills have not been done by woman?
Who was't betrayed the Capitol? A woman!
Who lost Mark Antony the world? A woman!
Who was the cause of a long ten years' war,
And laid at last old Troy in ashes? Woman!
Destructive, damnable, deceitful woman!”

without finding one's understanding—certainly of the sex's relation to money—much increased. The serious poets have not considered the matter either. For example,

“O lyric voice, half angel and half bird,”

may present a capital notion of the female, but scarcely suggests—much less guarantees—her financial capacity. Birds are not concerned with wealth, nor would one necessarily look out for an angel, if one desired to bank a million pounds.

Illingborough had to fall back on his own reasoning powers, and even so found many complex and self-entangling considerations presenting themselves. Was a fortune, for example—counting to hundreds of thousands—to be regarded as a reward for pure virtue? Might it not rather be thought a test of strength—a responsibility that by the labour it

would entail could not possibly be regarded as a reward? Certainly, whether one looked upon so much wealth as enviable or not, one must infallibly regard it as a responsibility; and it was on this line of reasoning that Illingborough saw that he must go to make his judgement. The person to deserve the invitation or the fortune must be the most responsible—the most balanced character. The difficulty remained that Illingborough felt himself a most inadequate judge.

He got out of the train at Porton Langley to find a little wind bringing in the scent of the sea, but no sign of the conveyance which from Miss Wetherborne's letter he had expected to find waiting for him. The two porters whom Illingborough interviewed said that nothing had come from the Sea House to the station that day, but the gentleman could get a trap if he liked to wait half an hour or so. Or his things could be sent on by the station cart, if he preferred to walk. He could get to Mazinghope, he was told, either by the cliff or by the beach.

Illingborough decided to walk by the beach, and a few minutes later he was marching parallel with the sea.

The salt air, always stimulating to town dwellers, mounted to his head like wine. And, like a man with wine in him, he forgot for the time being his

wonted demeanour and routine thoughts. The subtleties of the law in that sparkling atmosphere took wings and vanished from his brain; the very purpose for which he had come into this sea-bound district became of no account. It might be his duty to execute future justice by careful reflection upon and observation of the capabilities of woman, and women might be light-headed or angelic—these things mattered nothing at all to Illingborough. The sun was on the sea, and around him were cool shadowed pools among tumbled rocks and stretches of clean sand and slippery stones and causeways green with weed. At first he pursued his way awkwardly enough, but soon he began to speed along as though he had been some goat pent a long time in a cage, but now regaining his pristine elasticity. It was no desire to reach his destination that sent Illingborough hurrying; it was only the intoxication of the air and the feeling of escape in his limbs. The chase of a sedate and melancholy sea-gull which eventually became a part of the wind and left him breathless had the effect upon Illingborough of making him wish to rest. He lay down on a rock, and presently in the warm sun fell asleep.

He was awaked by a musical voice at no great distance, and rousing himself saw a young girl riding a horse on the edge of the sea. She made a picture

for an artist, though she was unconscious of it ; and a picture for Illingborough, though he did not know he was an artist. He watched it with charmed eyes.

Far out the sun shone on the smooth shallow water, and glittered on the smooth wet sand ; and where the girl rode, coaxing her horse, just where the sea and sand met, it made of the beaten ripples a foaming fringe of silver. The horse pawed and splashed a dust of silver froth. It seemed afraid. The girl patted it and coaxed it forward, but it whinnied and jibbed at the advancing sea, at which she headed it so firmly. It tried a sideways motion, as though it felt it could bear the strange element better that way. But this the girl would not have. Eyes front was her motto, it seemed, and she urged it outwards till the water was nearly to its knees, and it moaned with fear. The fear under such a leader might have been vanquished but for a Triton of a wave which followed some minnow-like ripples and broke full on the horse's front. At that it reared mightily for a moment, wheeled on hind-legs, and then helter-skeltered through the shallows. It was in full gallop for the rocks on which Illingborough lay before he had quite realised what was happening.

He sprang to his feet with the horse almost up to him. To think, with Illingborough, was not necessarily to act, but circumstances alter temperaments. If

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the horse passed him, the girl would inevitably be dashed from her saddle on to the rocks. That was unthinkable. In the twinkling of a second Illingborough had plunged clumsily at the reins as the horse sped by him, had been pulled to his knees, and by his dead weight had brought the horse to a sudden stand. He was still on his knees—with a good deal of sand in his mouth—when the girl, who had all but shot over her horse's neck, spoke with a sharpness none the less disconcerting because it was uttered in clear and ringing tones.

“What on earth did you do that for?” she said.

Looking up from his necessarily humble position Illingborough saw that she had recovered herself in the saddle, but her face was all a frown.

“I was afraid,” he explained, “that you were going to be killed.”

“Nonsense!”

Anne delivered this commentary with so much decision that for a moment Illingborough was completely abashed. He had made a mistake, it seemed. Perhaps she wouldn't have been dashed from the saddle on to the rocks. Perhaps the horse would have stopped in good time. His habit of self-depreciation made it seem quite possible to Illingborough that he had done a nonsensical thing. Still, the horse

had been going tremendously fast, and a moment's reflection served to show him that even if his action had been precipitate, he had not done anything so inexcusable that it might not be mended by an apology.

"I apologise for my mistake," he said.

"A lot of good that will do," said Anne, "if you have made John Mark strain himself."

The only thing that Illingborough had caused to be strained was his wrist, but there was no object in mentioning that.

"I sincerely hope not," he said, and judging that no good could result from further conversation with this apparently hot-headed and undoubtedly plain-spoken young woman, he lifted his hat and turned to go. But an idea had suddenly seized Anne.

"Who are you?" she said abruptly.

Illingborough stopped, thinking she was about to insist on his name and address.

"My name is Illingborough and——"

"Good gracious! Why didn't you say so before? And why didn't you come by the trap? You are coming to us, aren't you?"

So this was one of the Miss Wetherbornes. Illingborough again lifted his hat.

"Miss Wetherborne?"

"Not exactly. I'm Anne. Jocelyne's the Miss.

Not that it much matters. Why didn't you come by the trap ? ”

“ Well, the fact is,” said Illingborough politely, “ I walked because—because there didn't seem to be a trap at the station. I had rather expected one, but possibly——” Illingborough was anxious to explain away any possible neglect on the part of his young hostess in case it should make her feel uneasy—“ possibly it was an inconvenient train for me to come by.”

Anne did not appear particularly uneasy.

“ Didn't we tell you to come by that train ? ” she asked.

“ Yes——”

“ What's the good of talking like that then ? I forgot the trap. I remember now. Jocelyne did ask me to tell Tom to come, but I forgot.”

It was an explanation without in any sense being an apology, and Illingborough's spirits fell. For here before him was one of the candidates giving herself away terribly. A hot temper and carelessness and—Illingborough tried to prevent the word discourtesy from coming into his mind since this perhaps was a personal matter, but the thought would come—these were painful revelations to one who was in the position of a judge, having powers of punishment and reward.

“ It really didn't matter in the least,” he said

hastily, in case beneath the calm exterior of this Miss Wetherborne, some as yet invisible embarrassment might lurk. -If it did, his words did not bring it to the surface.

"No, it won't kill you to walk, will it?" said Anne.

"The cliff path's shorter."

"I like to be near the sea," said Illingborough.

"Do you?" Anne softened slightly. Jocelyne's plottings had prepared her to be cold to Mr. Illingborough, and his want of provocation under her rudeness had further incensed her. But she could not but admit that he seemed well intentioned. And if he liked the sea, that was something. The sea was one of her passions, like horses. All things that moved quickly and strongly, moved her. Perhaps he was not such a nuisance as he had seemed, though disposed to talk a good deal. He was talking now.

"I like it most in calm weather, and on a coast like this. It makes me expect to hear something like the cuckoo-bird. You remember the lines?"

"Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides."

Anne nodded graciously.

"Let's go on," she said. "John Mark doesn't like standing still. Those lines," she added, thinking it would perhaps be kind to make some conversation, "are rather jolly. Whose are they? Moore's?"

Illingborough, who had moved on meekly enough at her bidding, stopped dead. A literary error showing such gross ignorance could make him pugnacious in his turn.

"Moore's! Good Heavens, no—they're Wordsworth's."

"It's all the same to me," said Anne happily. "I've never read either of them. I think poetry's rather rot."

"Really?" said Illingborough, stepping on quickly. She did not notice the irony.

"But I like those lines well enough," she said, still thinking of them.

"Wordsworth would be gratified to know it," said Illingborough. His indignation was now so obvious that it reached Anne's intelligence. She looked down at him, saw his frown, and broke into sudden laughter.

"You're very funny, Mr. Illingborough," she said, peeling away. "You don't seem to mind in the least being called a blithering idiot, and yet you get in a rage because I don't happen to know about your poetry."

"It is not my poetry," said Illingborough stiffly.

"Wordsworth's then. Don't you mind being called a fool?" she asked curiously.

Her frankness, brusque as it was, restored Illingborough to his usual good-nature.

"Not when I am one," he said.

"I'm not sure that you were," said Anne.

But in the game of generosity Illingborough was easily to be outdone.

"Oh, but I'm sure I was," he said. "In fact, I expect I placed you in considerable danger, Miss Wetherborne, by stopping your horse like that, and I hope you will forgive me. Of course I ought to have known that, being quite ignorant about horses, I was pretty sure to make a mistake. I suppose it really wasn't running away."

"Well, he was trying to," Anne admitted. "Not that it mattered. He's done it often enough. Still you couldn't be expected to understand that."

"I shall hope to learn more about horses while I am here," said Illingborough.

"You won't do much in a month," said Anne, "and probably you won't want to stop as long as that when you know what we're like. Don't for goodness' sake be polite," she went on, as he began to protest. "You don't know what we're like, so what's the good of pretending you do? Of course you'll like the sea. There's the house!"

They had been going along the sandy strip at the edge of the sea, and now as they turned a little promontory she pointed with her whip at a grey stone house, standing all by itself in its

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hanging garden. Beyond, the cliff rose to a steep headland.

"That's Wrack Head," said Anne. "There's quite a race round it at some tides. Rather jolly to have a race of one's own. Practically the whole bay is ours."

She spoke with a pride which the bay deserved by its picturesqueness rather than by its size. It was very small even at the low tide, when a little chaos of rocks was added to it. Anne pointed out the small stream that ran into it from the valley in which Mazinghope proper lay. The stream seemed to be guided out to sea by tall stakes driven into the sea bottom, and Anne explained that their presence there was to mark the only channel of approach from seaward at most states of the tide.

"Of course if you know every rock you can run in a bit quicker on a high tide," she said, "but to begin with, if you go out by yourself, you'd better follow the poles."

"I will," said Illingborough, who was not of a maritime tendency.

"Both those boats," said Anne, pointing to two boats drawn up on the beach, "are ours. There's some not bad fishing to be had. We go up on to the road now."

She turned her horse through piles of seaweed,

which gave the richest odour in the sun, and crossed to where the cobbled road dipped to the beach level before rising again to ascend the headland. Half-way up this stood the Sea House, bowered in its trees that seemed to grow out of the rock, and gay with garden flowers sliding to the water.

"How awfully jolly," said Illingborough, as he opened the gate for Anne to ride through.

"Do you think so?" Anne looked down at him suspiciously. "Most people say it looks so lonely. Down, Buzz! It's our lodger, Buzz. Don't bite him."

A massive bull-dog, black and brindled, which had risen and given a tigerish growl on seeing Illingborough, thereupon contented itself with snuffing Illingborough's shins slowly and thoroughly.

"Shall I pat him?" said Illingborough.

"Well, you'll have to try and make friends," said Anne, "or you'll be a dead lodger soon. Scratch him under the elbows."

Illingborough, bending gingerly to this operation, which threatened as ill consequences for him if he did it the wrong way as a dentist might fear if he touched up the nerve of a madman's tooth, was conscious of the soft rustle of skirts near at hand, and of a sweet voice that said—

"Mr. Illingborough? Oh Anne, how could you forget the carriage for Mr. Illingborough?"

"Same way as I forget most things," said Anne, unabashed, as Illingborough straightened himself awkwardly. "That's my sister Jocelyne," she continued, "Miss Wetherborne to wit. She will offer you any condolences you may require. Come, Buzz."

She rode off towards the stables, followed by the great dog, while Illingborough, having shaken the small hand proffered to him, listened to Miss Wetherborne's sympathetic voice.

"I do hope you will be able to forgive us. Anne is too forgetful. That dreadfully long walk! And you aren't really tired? Oh, but you must be! Do come in and let me show you your room. Supper will be ready whenever you are."

It was early hours to judge, and personal considerations were not to be allowed a place; but Illingborough, as he followed his fair young hostess into the house, could not help feeling glad to know that for Mr. Mortlake's fortune there was at least one worthy competitor.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SCALES BEGIN TO DIP

ILLINGBOROUGH came down to the dining-room, in which Jocelyne had informed him supper would be ready, to find Mr. Wetherborne sipping a glass of hock at the dining table. A cloth suggesting supper—one might say several suppers—was undoubtedly laid upon it, but otherwise it did not contain the materials requisite to this meal. Inasmuch, however, as Jocelyne arrived at almost the same moment, dreadfully distressed, and explaining volubly that if she chanced to go out, everything went wrong, and introduced Illingborough to her father, who at once offered him some hock and began chatting agreeably, the small wait that ensued was not a thing to complain of even to his inward hungry self. He was charmed with Mr. Wetherborne, as everybody was who met him for the first time, and this in spite of the fact—awkward to a sensitive person occupying the peculiar position of a paying guest—that Mr. Wetherborne did not seem to have heard of his intended arrival or

even of his name. To those who knew Mr. Wetherborne it was a moot point to what extent he actually was ignorant of the things that went on around him. It seemed impossible that he could be as ignorant as he seemed, until his superb idleness was realised.

Idleness, whatever the moralists may say, is the rarest of the vices; and for this reason, that no other vice more continuously irks its victims. There is no sort of relief from it. A tiger in a cage is not more dissatisfied than the ordinary strong man set down to idleness. For the caged tiger at least can look out upon the liberty it wants; it has the bars of its cage to ravine against, it has the hope and the vision of its desire. But the idle man is caged in illimitability; the prison out of which he must break is the whole encompassing world. Still, the most hideous fatalism has its devotees—human enough otherwise to all appearance—and idleness had a very devout, a very human-seeming, and in exteriors a very elegant and gentlemanly disciple in Mr. Wetherborne. He had done nothing all his life, and had retained an unimpaired equilibrium. Those who believe that everything exists solely for the purpose of forwarding the needs of humanity would have to admit that Mr. Wetherborne's only *raison d'être* must be to serve as an object lesson to psychologists—as the man who has done nothing and suffered

nothing. You could not say that he had ever lifted his little finger in active work, and yet you could not look at him and think him in ever so small a degree a victim. The sloth, pendent from an artificial bough in the Mammal's department of a Zoological Gardens, might be supposed to entertain behind its somnolence some regret for the freer more tropical air that used to fan its dreams, might be supposed to pine drowsily for a sky to snooze under rather than a ceiling. But no one could suppose that Mr. Wetherborne regretted anything or pined for anything. He was the example of contentment which might not be divine, but could not be surpassed even by the gods upon Olympus. He had been to a public school and failed gracefully as far as one can fail at such a place. He had proceeded to the University, and done likewise. Then he had begun to read for the Bar. His marriage—the most strenuous work of his life—had somehow prevented that from being more than a beginning. He had found his hands fully occupied in dispensing—not riotously, but with considerable ease—his wife's moderate fortune. She had died shortly after Joan's birth, and Mr. Wetherborne had long ago forgotten the grief—not to say inconvenience—this had caused him. Nowadays he was contented enough. The Sea House suited him. So did the neighbourhood. It is true he had been dropped by neighbours, slowly

but surely, but he did not mind that. They had dropped him really because he did not mind. Even in a world not very certain why it hob-nobs with some people rather than with other people, and prone to regard the irreproachable as the sociable, Mr. Wetherborne's amiable indifference had, in the end, palled. People less gentlemanly perhaps but more interesting—because they were more interested—took his place at dinners, shooting-parties, card-parties; "the calls upon his leisure" as he politely put it, had become fewer; the leisure had become complete, never having been very much short of complete.

How he spent his time it would be hard to say. He did things like other people—ate moderately, drank a little, smoked a little. Occasionally he took a stroll or read a book. He was ready for a chat with any man. He disliked argument, and would have an engagement elsewhere if any one started arguing with him—the only occasions on which he was engaged. He never gave orders if he could help it, because the giving of orders involves, to some extent, the duty of seeing them carried out—an impossible task to Mr. Wetherborne. He never rebuked any one—for the reason that not only does the act of rebuking verge upon the laborious, but it presupposes a certain passion for one's own views which was unknown to him.

Consciously, Mr. Wetherborne never interfered with anything or anybody ; he would not have done so for worlds, consciously.

Unconsciously, of course, he was usually in the way. Drones always are in the way, by some irony of fate, as surely as the veriest meddler. How could a man indifferent, irresponsible, lazy to the marrow of him, not be in the way ? The best of men—unless he be some island Crusoe—cannot but get in the way sometimes in a world where all is moving. Mr. Wetherborne had three daughters. He would have contended (too strenuous word) that they had grown up natural enough : he had not interfered with nature—excellent goddess. Nevertheless he had interfered. Nature would not have set them down there in isolation. Nature would certainly not have caused their neighbours to drop them for their father's sake. Nature would certainly have drifted them down the stream of the life of their time, but for the dead weight of Mr. Wetherborne they must drag with them. Drifting unencumbered a boat will surely be drawn into some stream at last that flows to the heart of the world, but a boat with the heaviest of anchors to it cannot even drift. It sticks.

Still the anchor can be picturesque ; and a human anchor can be outwardly very pleasant.

Illingborough, modestly supposing either that Mr.

Wetherborne was perhaps too busy to have been troubled by his daughters with so small a matter as that of his arrival, or that it had slipped a memory stored with more important matters, was all the more gratified to find his unexpected intrusion treated with so much affability, and listened respectfully to the lengthy anecdotes concerning polo matches, black game shooting, yachting and other mostly sporting matters with which Mr. Wetherborne regaled him. He would perhaps rather have had his supper, but if there had to be an interval, it certainly could not have been more genially bridged. He had the satisfaction, moreover, of seeing with what grace and absence of self-consciousness Jocelyne could assist in the laying of the table. Anne did not appear until the meal had actually been brought in by Mrs. Odler—an elderly woman who had come to Mr. Wetherborne many years ago from another county. She did the chief work of the house, but liked to do it, as she always explained, in her own way. Her own way being one that took little account of punctuality, partly accounted for the lateness of the meal on this occasion, though Mrs. Odler also stated to Anne, who went into the kitchen to help dish up, that Miss Jocelyne had never said anything to her about having it at a particular time.

“ And if she don't pay Ketchup's bill shortly, I don't

meself," added Mrs. Odler, "see no use in naming particular times, for without meat you can't dine; at least gentlemen can't. And Ketchup he said he wasn't goin' to send no more jints till paid he was. This steak I mostly seized from his boy when he come round with the bill. He had orders not to deliver it—without the bill was paid."

"I suppose it'll be tough then," said Anne, a little, but not very anxious, for Ketchup had revolted often enough and come round.

"If it is, it won't be for want of beating," said Mrs. Odler. "But there—what can you expect?"

"Oh, it'll be all right," said Anne. "And I'll speak to Ketchup myself about his bill. He'll get it some time of course, and in the meantime Mr. Illingborough has to be fed."

It generally fell to Anne to speak on such matters to the tradespeople, Jocelyne's pride not permitting her to do it. It was not that Anne demeaned herself. Anne could exercise a simple and one might almost say genial haughtiness on occasions when Jocelyne only felt herself ill at ease. The tradespeople rather liked to be rebuked by their scornful young debtor. Even in this democratic age—in many parts of the country—those with a natural feudal manner can command an influence that no others can.

"I hope he don't eat much," was Mrs. Odler's

comment. "If he do, you'll have to go fishing, Miss Anne. Being from London, he'll like fish—and then there's eggs, if Miss Joan wouldn't sell them all to Gardiner's for the church. I don't call it right meself to c'lect money for church charity when there's bills unpaid."

"I'll tell Tom to get them in before Joan gets up," said Anne. "Then you can hide them from her. And I'll go fishing. There, you'd better take the steak up now."

Anne followed the steak in and, in her own words, chopped it, whereupon Mr. Wetherborne, who was unable to attend to more than one thing at a time, ceased telling stories of his early days, and ate his food gravely and carefully as one who knows the importance of keeping together a body and soul invaluable to the community. The value of the digestion was one of his favourite topics, upon which he could speak strongly and wisely; and the only question that sometimes arose in the mind of his listeners was whether the assumption of the equal value of all digestions was justifiable, or whether, if something had gone wrong with Mr. Wetherborne's, it would have greatly mattered.

The conversation devolved upon Jocelyne, who with great skill fenced with Illingborough's inquiries as to the architectural features of the neighbourhood,

while Anne sat silent, cynically interested in her sister's brilliant evasions of facts, and glad to observe that Illingborough promised to be a moderate eater. He refused a second helping of steak, and at that Anne's heart went out towards him.

"If you want to know the dates of churches round," she said dryly, "you'd better go and see the rector. Jos knows no more about them than Buzz."

"That's too unkind," said Illingborough, shocked at so unsisterly a remark, "though of course I understand you're only speaking in fun. Miss Wetherborne, I should have said, was quite an authority."

"Oh no, I'm not that," said Jocelyne, with meek candour and a beaming smile.

"Better wait and see if there are Gothic windows where she's said," said Anne. "I don't believe you've ever been to St. Nicholas Morton, Jos."

"Not with you, my dear," said Jocelyne quite sweetly. "Because I know you are not really interested. But I have often walked over for my own pleasure——"

"Brass rubbing?" asked Anne cynically, knowing Jocelyne's walks were taken solely for social and shopping purposes, and that the church in question stood solitary among heather hills seven miles from anywhere.

"I love it most by moonlight," said Jocelyne

amiably. Something in Illingborough's ingenuous face warned her that the bickerings which were often the sole digestive employed at meals at the Sea House would not appeal to him. She scored heavily by this discernment, for Illingborough added to the indictment against Anne a frivolous envy of her sister's artistic appreciations which could not be overlooked. He plunged eagerly into a discussion of the effects of moonlight upon medieval architecture — so eagerly that Jocelyne was saved any opportunity of giving herself away, while Anne became insensibly interested. She had never met a man who talked with such fervour of things that she had only known vaguely were beautiful. Something that he said brought to her memory a picture of St. Nicholas Morton, as she had seen it in a winter sunset one day when she was riding home alone from a long day's hunting. What that tower on the waste, backed by leagues of reddening sky, had suggested to her, she could not have said. But in her somewhat pagan imagination she had been carried for a moment to a paradise that was a happy hunting-ground, where a fox ran for ever with the hounds in full chase, and she followed flying, and crisp winds blew, and hedges and ditches slipped under her horse's belly, and he took with never a jerk the high barred gates of heaven. She had expected, just for a moment, to hear the sound of lovely horns

far off ; and an aureoled saint crying " Tally ho " out of that sky would not have surprised her. She actually had waited, the reins slack on John Mark's neck, expecting some of these things, until the red began to fade, and the square-towered church began to gloom in the frosty twilight.

How was it that Mr. Illingborough, whom she would not have suspected of loving hunting and such things, had brought this memory back ? She could not think how he did it—but listened to him in order to find out. It is a method not overfavoured nowadays when short cuts to knowledge are imperative, and intuition is so diffused. Yet it has its advantages. Even if Anne could not discover what it was in Illingborough that made him seem different from people she knew, and interesting in spite of some absurd qualities, she could at least perceive that he had in him that differentiating virtue, and that it was not an accident or an assumption of the moment like Jocelyne's interest in architecture. Nor did it hurt her that by reason of his own sincerity he set hers—as exhibited in her criticism of Jocelyne—down to frivolity and a want of interest in a profound subject. She was not devoid of interest, and his very exclusion of her from the conversation (though Illingborough did not exactly intend to exclude her : he would have been horrified to think he had) helped her to a little know-

ledge of what he was talking about. She had not to interrupt her thoughts and growing curiosity by random answers and feigned interest, as Jocelyne had ; and could have given a far more accurate digest of his table-talk than her sister, besides being able to pass the vegetables and to induce her father to refill Illingborough's glass. She would never have supposed that the lodger who had so absurdly stopped her horse that afternoon and had been so angry about Wordsworth could be so pleasant and interesting as she found him ; and certainly she would never have expected to feel angry at Joan for coming in half-way through the meal and thereby stopping what had almost become a lecture.

"What was that you were saying about churches ? " Joan asked as soon as she had been introduced and given a portion of steak. "Are you interested in the church ? Because if so, and you can carve, there's lots of work to be done in this parish."

"Now, Joan," said Jocelyne warningly, "let Mr. Illingborough have his supper before you catechise him——"

"Well, he was talking about churches," said Joan aggressively.

"Architecture," put in Anne. "Jos is interested in it, you know."

"No," said Joan, "I didn't."

Jocelyne smiled uneasily, but she need not have been afraid. Illingborough, convinced that she had initiated the subject and carried on much of the conversation, regarded Joan's words as only a further example of sisterly depreciation.

"Then I can answer for it," he said, with a smile, "that you miss a great many opportunities. Miss Wetherborne has told me more about the churches round here than I should have thought possible in the time."

"Has she told you," said Joan, "what we want to do in ours?"

"No," said Illingborough.

"We were talking about church architecture," said Jocelyne.

"So am I," said Joan. "Carving is architecture, isn't it? Well, the rector and I want——"

"Why not say I and the rector?" Anne asked.

"Want to get some carving done on the rood-screen. Odo Watterly has promised to try his best——"

"He's the rector's son," interpolated Anne.

"And I was wondering if you would help too, Mr. Illingborough?" said Joan.

"I'm ashamed to say," said Illingborough, "that I can't carve. It sounds most interesting though. What form of carving do you propose to have?"

"Oh, I don't know. Something showy that won't take too long to do. Flowers in squares look rather well—at least I saw some in a paper that did——"

"With skulls and cross-bones underneath," suggested Anne.

"We are talking of work for the church, Anne," said Joan severely.

"To be sure. I'd forgotten. Flowers in squares—and what about squares in flower-pots?"

"You understand nothing about it," said Joan, annoyed; "and I do not think the rector would care to hear you treat a solemn subject with levity. Perhaps, Mr. Illingborough," she went on, disregarding Anne's statement that she hadn't been aware that she was talking to the rector—"you'd like to come up to the church and give your opinion, even if you can't do any of the carving yourself. And I could show you some of our villagers at the same time. I often visit them, though I get little thanks for it. But they have to be kept up to the mark."

To prevent Anne from irritating her younger sister further, Illingborough hastened to say that he would be delighted to accept her invitation, though his opinion was, he must warn her, valueless.

"Oh, I don't know, I ask every one," said Joan. "You never know who may have an idea. By the way, I was to say that there is a rectory tennis

party some time—I forget when—and will you all come ? ”

“ Perhaps we may if the date suits,” said Jocelyne ; then noticing that her father had finished, rose from the table.

“ You’ll entertain Mr. Illingborough, father, won’t you ? ” she added, relieved to think that for some little time to come at any rate she could escape from telling fibs about the architecture of the country.

“ Certainly,” said Mr. Wetherborne politely, “ I am going to have a glass of port, Mr. Illingborough. I hope you will join me. What a bad year this is likely to be for grouse.”

CHAPTER IX

FISHING AT DAWN

A FEELING as of peas in his bed caused Illingborough to sleep fitfully and wake early on the morning following his arrival at the Sea House. Too courteous to attribute this vigilant condition of mind and somewhat bruised condition of body to the way in which his bed had been made, and rather suspecting himself of luxurious habits so apt to grow upon a man if encouraged, he rose with a view to a bathe. Mr. Wetherborne had sat so long the night before over his glass of port and had retired so swiftly to bed at the end of it that Illingborough, who had elected to go out into the garden and watch the moon shine on the sea, had been unable to put him a question with regard to the most suitable place for bathing—an answer to which would have been convenient. But with illimitable sea in front of him and a moderate swimming capacity, there was nothing much to hinder his dipping where he pleased.

He went out into the garden, still dewy and scarcely

yet awake with birds, and descending the steep path beyond the rose-hedge almost stepped on to a small boy with brown legs who carried a garden fork.

"Sorry!" said Illingborough, checking his descent, as the boy turned an equally brown face upon him, and stood aside with a grin to let him go by. "There's not much room for two, is there?"

"Iddn't," said the boy cheerfully. "Not less they be two thin yins."

"Oh, I say, I'm not as fat as all that," said Illingborough, somewhat confused by the personal allusion involved in this hypothesis. "When you're my age you won't be much less thick, you know."

"I'll be tarler," said the boy. "Be goin' to bathe?"

"Yes," said Illingborough. "Where's the best place?"

"Round the big rock with the twitch on it," said the boy, nodding towards a great mass fallen from the cliff-edge almost to the sea, but with all its landward greenery still growing on its top. "There be a big pool there, smooth-bottomed and notten to cut yew on the shins."

"I'll go there then," said Illingborough, starting forward. The boy went ahead of him, but turned now and again to take him in with undisguised interest.

"Miss Anne be there now," he said, during one of these examinations. "Ye won't beat her swimmin'."

Illingborough came to an abrupt stop. Modesty forbade that he should form a mixed bathing party with an unchaperoned young lady, who had moreover not invited him to do so.

"You ought to have told me," he said to the boy.

"I did."

Illingborough laughed. The boy was so artlessly curt and so smilingly self-possessed, that it was impossible to take offence at him. He wondered a little if he had received his training from Miss Anne Wetherborne. His manner was a quaint edition of hers.

"I meant you should have told me before. I shall wait till Miss Anne comes up. What are you going to work at?" asked Illingborough, seeing the boy, who had reached the beach, search out a patch of sand and begin digging.

"Wurrums!"

"Sand-worms?"

"Lobs—for fishin'—Miss Anne's going. Maybe she'll take yew with her, if yew ask her."

The boy seemed to think Illingborough would not fail to avail himself of such a treat, and Illingborough was not sure himself that he would fail either. The sea sparkled like the grass, as though it too was

covered with freshest dew. It called to a man to be on it or in it, even with one who thought poetry foolish.

"Is Miss Anne a great fisherman?" he asked, watching the boy as he turned up great fat oozy worms and slipped them unconcernedly into a tin he had brought with him.

"Miss Anne can dew anything," said the boy. Here was a testimonial that Illingborough had not expected, and it woke him to a sense of duty. He was not here simply to amuse himself, but to deliver a judgment, based on the best evidence. The evidence of a small, brown-legged, lob-worm-digging boy might not be worth much, but it was worth something. It was at least worth sifting.

"What do you mean by everything?" he asked.

The boy leant on his fork and fixed Illingborough with small sharp brown eyes.

"Everything," he said. "Everything as other folks can do, and everything as other folks can't do." It was royal praise, but he spoilt it a little by going on. "Tell yew—Miss Anne can bait her own hooks with lobs."

Illingborough, with the future slimy victims of this handiwork writhing before him in the tin, shuddered slightly—"I suppose it's not very nice work?" he said.

“ Pends on whether yew want a fish or not.”

There was truth in this, and Illingborough turned it over. “The other young ladies wouldn’t like to do it ?”

“ ’Twouldn’t matter if they did.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Any fish ’ud know who was at th’ end o’ their lines——”

“ And not be hooked, you mean ? ” The boy nodded, evidently thinking him very slow of understanding, and a great user of words, which indeed he was disposed to be. Lawyers are trained that way, and Illingborough was trying to get his evidence exact. He was not sure even now how much or how little the boy meant by his laudation, and to test him further said—

“ Still, baiting hooks and catching fish isn’t everything, is it ? ”

He must have infused a certain depreciation of Anne into his tone, for this champion of hers, after looking at him askance, said—

“ Nobody said as ’twas, ’less yew did,” and began digging again.

Illingborough tried him with one or two questions calculated to bring out his further opinion of Anne, but failed, and had to content himself with trying to methodise what he had heard both for and against. It was to Anne’s crédit no doubt

that she should have so great an admirer in this small urchin, and implied not only a skill in sport which he could quite credit, but also a good nature of which he had had less assurance. On the other hand, small boys are easy-going admirers. He remembered the school heroes of his own youth. Watson Major, Baddelford, Beaver—the names recurred of boys who could run, or jump, or play cricket, but had no other great pretensions to heroism. Skill in sport, moreover, does not necessarily accompany skill in “good living,” as the moralists had it; and a girl skilled in sport must be supposed to have certain qualities which are not particularly feminine without—on the other hand—being highly and necessarily admirable. Was Anne Wetherborne such a girl? He looked at the digging boy as though he could solve these questions, and had them still unsolved when Anne herself came round the big rock on which the grass grew. Stockingless, with a short skirt and wispy hair, she was distinctly less proud-looking than when on horseback, but she was not the hoyden some girls look in that plight; rather, she reminded Illingborough of one of the more graceful water-creatures—an otter come to land, all streaming, for a scramble, doubtful in the strange element, but not dismayed or forgetful of the ease that was hers in her own deeper world.

She nodded a good-morning to Illingborough.

"Going to bathe?" she said.

"I was thinking of it," said Illingborough.

"Then you'd better go to my pool," she said.

"So the boy was telling me," said Illingborough awkwardly, and began to stumble. "I thought I'd—I'd wait and see if you allowed it?"

At that she turned on the boy.

"What right had you to say that anybody might go to my pool, Tom?" she said. "You know very well that nobody may go there except me and John Mark, and you, when you've been particularly good."

"Thought he'd like to see yew swimming," said the boy.

"Pooh!" said Anne, and turned back to Illingborough. "He thinks me a marvel because I taught him to swim, and a great nuisance he was to teach. Used to funk it, didn't you, Tom?"

"Didn't keer for the big waves," said Tom.

"Funked it," said Anne insistently. "And then offered the pool to a gentleman you don't know. Oh, it's all right," as Illingborough began to say that any available piece of water would serve his purpose. "I call it my pool, but it's the sea, of course, and the nicest piece round. The rocks are worn flat, and you go in deep at once and have to swim through a ring-hole to the open. Only the open's more rocky than

the pool, and you're apt to cut yourself. So I don't go except when it's quite calm."

"Then I'll use the pool," said Illingborough.
"You're going fishing, I hear?"

"Yes. Would you like to come?" said Anne. She had not intended to invite him, but a certain comprehension that he seemed to show with regard to the pool had pleased her.

"I should like it most awfully," said Illingborough.
"Only—only——"

His reverence of the convenances, remarkable in so young a man, was what caused his hesitation. Would Mr. Wetherborne, he wondered, like him to go out fishing alone with one of his daughters before breakfast? He hadn't quite gathered what Mr. Wetherborne's attitude might be. Of course, it was all right in one way—before breakfast wasn't after dinner—but was it in another?

"Only what?" said Anne.

"Shan't I be a nuisance?" said Illingborough, not quite candidly.

"You will be if you want me to row you in just when they've begun to bite because you feel sick," said Anne. "Not otherwise."

"I think I can promise not to do that."

"Hurry then," she said. "Tom, you can go up and get some biscuits for Mr. Illingborough. You'll

want them. We shall be out an hour or more, and you haven't had breakfast."

Coming back from his swim in the pool, which had more than answered Anne's description of it, except that the water seemed icy, owing to the sun being as yet shut off from it, Illingborough found Anne and the boy standing by a small boat, marked in white letters, *The Merry*. *The Merry* was almost in the sea.

"Get in," said Anne, "and take the oars, please. You look frozen. Tom and I'll shove off. Now, Tom, one, two, three."

A moment later she had sprung in over the stern with wet feet, and Illingborough was pulling down the channel between the sticks she had pointed out to him the day before. Anne gave directions to him.

"We haven't got much time, if we're to catch any for breakfast," she said. "Not that we're going far. Pull your right. Do you prefer a rod or a line?"

"I'm equally inefficient with both," said Illingborough.

"Then you'd better have the line."

She stopped him not very far out and supervised the throwing overboard of *The Merry's* anchor, a big stone with rope attached, then put together her sea-rod in two joints and slipped on her huge reel.

Illingborough watched the easy way in which she managed things, and only looked away when she turned round to the tin of slobbery bait, and dipped a finger for a choice specimen of fat red writhing. He was not certain in his own mind whether he was angry most with the slim fingers for being so merciless or with the snaky worms for being so odious.

"Feeling ill?" she said a moment later, when he had heard the plop of her lead followed by the sizzling of the line running out.

"No," said Illingborough.

"Why aren't you fishing then?"

Illingborough pulled himself together, and decided that he was hypercivilised, as indeed he was. What right had he—a parasite by profession—to object to the methods of a bread-earner? She was fishing for breakfast.

"I'm just going to," he said, and with averted eyes impaled a lob-worm and hurled it desperately into the cool concealing waters. Anne at the same moment pulled up a sizeable fish almost on to Illingborough's lap. The critics and the enthusiasts of fishing have both gone to extremes in dealing with their subject, and perhaps the critics are the more justified of the two. It remains an elementary fact that the sudden capture of a silver flash from a green deep excites a man. Illingborough grabbed at the rock-whiting

and almost hooked himself in trying to unhook it. Then, as his own line telephoned news of victory to him, and his own fish streaked up into the daylight, he forgot his scruples. For the next half-hour he forgot the question of whether for his own pleasure he should inflict what may be pain on creatures of incalculable senses, and caught a dozen fish to his own hand. At times he chatted excitedly to Anne ; at others he forgot to talk in the tenseness of his interest. His sense of touch was all for his own line ; his eyes for Anne's rod and the moment when the stout top-joint would begin to quiver. He shook with eagerness once when Anne struck, and the whole rod went double under the weight of whatever was on.

"What can it be ? " he said.

"Dog-fish, I expect," said Anne, and brought one up a few minutes later and over the edge of the boat, though it must have weighed ten pounds.

"Food for Buzz," she said, as the thing began crawling the centre of the boat. "Take care—you'll get nipped," she added; as Illingborough flung himself upon it with enthusiasm. "Hit it on the head with an oar."

Illingborough did so with a fervour which would have been impossible half an hour before. He felt primitive, like one dancing on the corpse of his enemy. Anne smiled to see him. "It seems rather brutal

to hit the poor dog-fish like that, doesn't it?" she said mischievously.

Illingborough blushed and sat down.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself," he said, frowning.

"Why?"

He didn't answer. He was trying to think out the moral of the thing. Surely it was wrong for him, who had no concern with such matters, to be gloating over the butchery of a fish. If the fish had to be butchered, it should be done decently and soberly by a professional. He had enough humour to refrain from explaining his scruples immediately upon an exhibition of his barbarism; and it was a perception of this that caused Anne to deal leniently with him.

"Buzz will be very grateful to you," she said. "It's time we went back now."

Illingborough pulled up his line and got the anchor on board in a sobered frame of mind. The sea was very beautiful. So was the girl beside him in the boat. But the sea was cruel too, and had tempted him even in this byway to be a brute. Could the girl do the same? She had something of its immobility. But what right had he to criticise her? If she were cruel, she was not consciously so, as he had been. And she really was amiable. Illingborough based this notion on the fact that Anne, as he pulled shoreward,

suddenly asked him if there were more lines in Wordsworth about the sea. He took it as a kind attempt to talk of the things that interested him, whereas it was only curiosity. The other lines were still marching in her brain.

CHAPTER X

JOAN DAMAGES HER CHANCES

MORALISTS must have their off-time like other people ; and those are not the worst philosophers who relax their rigour at meals. Illingborough had his off-time at breakfast when he ate four rock-whiting and enjoyed them. His enjoyment did not, of course, dispose of the question of the humanity of angling : it only proved the character of Illingborough, and proved also that few men have the imagination that can pity a boiled fish. A living fish is another matter.

Jocelyne came down in some trepidation lest Mr. Illingborough should insist on walking her off to St. Nicholas Morton before she had time to get up any of its features from a guide-book, and she had prepared several excuses that would make such a pilgrimage appear impossible. She was relieved when he accepted Joan's invitation to go to the village that morning and examine the rood-screen.

" It is not finished yet, but we should like your

opinion on it. I have to visit one or two of the poor sick people as well," she continued; "but you won't mind that, will you? There's nothing infectious."

Illingborough gave her to understand that he would be only too delighted if they all had bubonic plague, and his courtesy gave Joan an additional idea.

"I shall have to take up a few things," she said thoughtfully.

"Mr. Illingborough being here to carry them," said Anne.

"Oh, I can carry them myself, thank you," said Joan, who did not, however, as a rule, care to load herself up the hot lane to Mazinghope. "Mr. Illingborough needn't take anything."

"But I should like to," said Illingborough.

"A few flowers then for Mrs. Gideon," Joan conceded.

"Something scented that'll make her sick in bed?" Anne asked.

"Why expose your own want of charity?" said Joan.

"Well, don't bag all the whiting," said Anne. "We took a lot of trouble catching them, and if you'd seen Mr. Illingborough hammering the dog-fish."

Illingborough blushed.

"I still feel a brute," he said—"at least—now that you remind me of it, I do."

"Sorry I spoke," said Anne, and grinned to hear the quick Jocelyne begin to speak of the pity it was that some sports had to be cruel.

"I really believe I hate them all," said Jocelyne, who was undoubtedly opposed to the fatigue they entailed.

"I daren't say that after this morning," said Illingborough.

"The dog-fish would turn in its pot if you did," said Anne.

"But it is a serious question," said Illingborough, and conveyed that he thought Jocelyne was on a higher pedestal than ordinary mortals. Just for a moment Anne rebelled at the thought, but only said lightly—

"It's just as well then that you're going to do a charity round with Joan—you'll feel humaner."

"And I must take you to St. Nicholas Morton another time," said Jocelyne, unable to resist making capital out of this convenience.

"Oh, if you had thought of that," said Illingborough, who would much have preferred it, "perhaps we shan't be long in the village?"

"No, no," said Jocelyne quickly, "any time will do for St. Nicholas Morton. Let Joan show you the village to-day. I have plenty to do in the house."

"Such as killing a pig for dinner," Anne suggested, opening her eyes at the unexpected explanation.

"Jocelyne is a tremendous housekeeper, you know," she continued for Illingborough's benefit.

"I can quite believe that Miss Wetherborne can do well what she gives her mind to," said Illingborough, who thought justly that he discerned disparagement.

Anne stared at him. Was he joking or merely polite? Or was he, on the other hand, a peculiarly dull young man?

"Do you often say things as nice as that?" she asked politely.

"It's a very small compliment to Miss Wetherborne, I know," said Illingborough.

Jocelyne smiled. She believed he was quite incredibly stupid, but she did not mind that. Seldom if ever had she come across anybody who had accepted her so readily as the sort of person she liked—now and again—to picture herself. She rather enjoyed playing this theoretic self. It was a pleasant sensation, and would make things particularly easy for her during the next few days, when she could really not give him her time, but would like to retain his flattering opinion. She felt that she could hand him over to Joan or Anne for weeks without their detaching him from his allegiance to her. She could also affect to disparage herself—a thing she usually found very hard to do, so very unusual was it to have her merits observed.

"Mr. Illingborough will find me out soon," she said graciously.

"I hope so," said Anne.

"And see that I'm a very ordinary country girl."

"That I am sure you are not," said Illingborough.

Half an hour later Illingborough, laden with a large basket containing goods taken from the larder, to Mrs. Odler's speechless indignation, and also a crude but large bunch of flowers, was wending his way towards Mazinghope under Joan's guidance. His inclination to stop and admire piece after piece of the road, where hart's-tongues peeped cool and green under high red banks; or lesser feathery ferns clung to solid walls of shale that looked for ever crumbling, was a good deal hampered by Joan's matter-of-factness.

"Yes, they like the shade," she would say. Or, "They last a good many years, but they want renewing pretty often in parts; or, "Yes, that's Dabblethwaite's field. It would be better if he used more lime."

A want of artistic faculty had to be laid at Joan's door, he decided, though her keenness and desire to serve her poorer neighbours would no doubt obliterate this small failing in the mind of a fair judge. Unfortunately for Joan, a certain youthful desire to show off her bounty; combined with the great heat of the

day, which made her protégés peevish and ungrateful, prevented Illingborough from having an opportunity of really admiring her methods. Mrs. Gideon, the sick woman, who received the bouquet, said she didn't hold with flowers in the house—much obliged to Miss Joan all the same. A bit of jelly would have been nice, but you couldn't expect healthy folks to think of what poor sufferers took fancies to, and of course jelly cost money too, which flowers didn't.

“A very grumbling woman,” said Joan, with a red face, as she led Illingborough from the stuffy cottage—not before Mrs. Gideon had recovered her spirits by narrating to the gentleman the more severe symptoms of her illness, and of how it had arisen in the first place from taking a powder on a full stomach.

“Which would you ha' know'd yourself, sir, not to do?” she demanded of Illingborough, who replied in some confusion that he was not sure that he would.

At the next cottage at which they called—for Joan to ascertain why a small girl, by name Christabel Muggs, had not attended Sunday school on the last occasion, a contretemps arose from the fact that Christabel, who was in and had had a rash but had learnt the collect all the same, refused to repeat the collect to Joan, preferring to keep her fingers in her mouth and watch Mr. Illingborough with large startled eyes. She seemed to think that if she

removed her fingers, Illingborough might take advantage of the fact to bite.

"You're a very naughty little girl," said Joan severely. "And I shall tell Mrs. Watterly about you."

Thereupon Christabel set up a wail, which coming through her wet fingers sounded peculiarly shrill and painful.

"She hev'n't got quite over the rash, I fear," said Mrs. Muggs feelingly. "She was always a delicate one like her pore little brother John wot died."

"Dear me!" said Illingborough, horrified.

"Yes, sir, he has a little stone all to hisself, John has, up in the churchyard, as Miss Joan'll tell 'ee," said Mrs. Muggs. "It's 'scribed beautiful"—

"JOHN MARMADUKE HOSEA MUGGS, aged 19 months.

Sadly missed."

"He must have been," said Illingborough feelingly, and was glad to get out of John Marmaduke's mother's residence.

"They are always sickeningly morbid," said Joan as they walked on up the village street, between the thatched and white-walled cottages, in the small gardens of which pink and yellow snapdragons or blue larkspurs gave touches of brightness. "As for Christabel—what she wants is a good sound whipping."

"Oh, I hardly think that," said Illingborough.

“ That’s because you don’t know these people.”

There came into Illingborough’s mind the recollection of a prophecy made by a modern writer of whom he thought highly. It was to the effect that when the next revolution took place, and the barricades were up, the first blood with which the gutters would flow red would be the blood of the philanthropists. In the plainer prose in which Illingborough was in the habit of thinking, this meant that modern beneficence is not carried on with a complete understanding of those benefited. Charity has become a judgement, and goodwill a tyranny. What would Joan be if she could play Lady Bountiful to her heart’s content ? He was too just to press the answer, but imperceptibly, as Joan’s round proceeded, her chances of being named a guest and an heiress became less. Even to assist at her charities made him feel a slave-driver.

He was relieved when Joan, having admonished such humble seniors as she found at home (and once or twice owing to noises within that suddenly ceased, even the unsuspecting Illingborough could not help fancying that some of the women called upon were at home without being visible), turned up a little path over a stile, that led them into the churchyard of Mazinghope Church. At least the occupants of a churchyard cannot be patronised, Illingborough thought.

He was not given to conceits, and was not encouraged in them on this occasion, for almost directly after this had occurred to him, they came upon a young man in the undress costume of a curate, dark grey flannels and a speckled straw hat, to whom Joan waved commandingly.

"Odo Watterly!" said Joan. "I thought he might be here. Odo," she continued, as the curate came up; "this is our guest, Mr. Illingborough. He's very keen on church matters."

"How do you do? It's a comfort to find a layman keen. So many fellows at the present day are, I fear, slack where the church is concerned," said Odo. He was a nice-looking young man with a face which his mother said was not round, and he had a manner which he tried to make seem austere when he could remember to. When he forgot, it was that of a slangy but pleasant and simple schoolboy. Joan's development into a church worker during his first year of ordination had at first appeared to him so much more rum and awe-inspiring even than his own change into a clergyman, that he had not at first been disposed to accept it as genuine. He had known her so long as an untidy and somewhat obstinate little girl, given to sulks, that it was hard to realise the change. But the greater individuality had triumphed over the lesser, and now he took Joan

at her own estimate and deferred to her, and told her what his vicar in the north advised him to do, and consulted her about his sermons, which were great stumbling-blocks to him. His father was rather too much of a scholar to be understanding, and could not sympathise with the most eloquent exhortations calculated to impress the brethren unless these were accompanied with grammar. Joan did not bother about the grammar so much and abetted the eloquence. Exhortations submitted to her became by emendation her own, and her chief concern was that Odo should enunciate them effectively. Illingborough liked his looks, but could not accept his compliment.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't think me much better than the others if you knew me," he said.

"But you're very interested in church architecture," said Joan.

"In an ignorant way," said Illingborough.

"Keeness is the thing," said Joan, and Odo nodded admiringly.

He could be very keen if kept up to it, and Joan could keep any one up to anything. "I've brought him to see the rood-screen. Unfortunately Mr. Illingborough doesn't carve, but he could give an opinion," she continued.

"Rather," said Odo. "It's in the vestry. So

are the patterns and some tools. In fact, I've been trying to do one of those flower things this morning, not on the screen itself. But, of course, it doesn't amount to much. Slippery job, carving."

"It's like the violin, I suppose," said Illingborough.

"Ah, yes," said Odo—not quite following the analogy.

"But the difference is," said Joan, "that this is sacred work. Help will be given us——"

"Rather—I mean—quite, quite," said Odo, shocked to find himself slangy on such an occasion.

They walked together to the little vestry—where the sun came through searchingly upon the rood-screen—of plain oak construction in several pieces, upon Odo's tools, and upon the sawdust he had made in his experiments. Even an enthusiast could not admit that help had so far been granted to these, and Odo did not require Joan's face to tell him so.

"No use at all, are they?" he said discouragedly. "Broke a chisel too as well as the beastly flower—I mean the—the flower. There'll have to be about a hundred of 'em too on the screen, which is harder wood. Toughish job—eh?"

"Faith," Joan reminded him, "can move mountains."

"Yes—but not in four Sundays—I mean, even if I stick to it all day, you know, I doubt if it would come

out really smart—or—I should say worthy. What do you say?" He turned to Illingborough, seeing a somewhat inexorable look on Joan's face. She was quite capable of persevering inexorably by proxy, and Odo did not quite so clearly see the fun—or rather the duty—of spending his holiday making sawdust.

"To tell the truth," said Illingborough, thus appealed to, "I think the pattern's hideous."

"By Jove, I hadn't thought of that," said Odo, brightening.

"Perhaps we'd better let it alone after all? Of course Joan and I thought that we ought to—to——"

"Give of our best to the rood-screen," said Joan.

"Quite," said Odo.

"But if one's best is to let it alone?" said Illingborough.

"Quite," repeated Odo. "He's on to it, Joan," and he looked at Illingborough admiringly. "Perhaps simplicity is more—more comely. I'm no judge myself."

"I'm only an amateur," said Illingborough, "but I'm certain that pattern won't do."

"We might find another," said Joan, and Odo's face fell.

Luckily for him, Illingborough's notions on the subject of rood-screens, as it turned out, were strongly in favour of simplicity, except where the finest work was

obtainable. He cited so many instances of notable rood-screens that were simple, and explained so admirably the reasons for this being the case, that even Joan was converted. Odo bestowed open admiration.

"By Jove," he said, "I don't believe the bishop knows more about 'em. I'm jolly glad Joan brought you along. We'll tell the rector we've chucked it, Joan."

Joan would have preferred otherwise. She was a regular slave-driver in church matters, and she felt too that Odo was more satisfactory when labouring under her eye. He was too apt to forget at times that he was a priest. Still, it was somewhat obvious that Mr. Illingborough knew what he was talking about, and she gave in.

"All right," she said, "perhaps we can think of something else to work at that will help to beautify St. Luke's."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Odo, without enthusiasm. "May as well clear out of here now——what? You're coming to our tennis squash, Mr. Illingborough, I hope? You play?"

"Not much," said Illingborough.

"I expect you do," said Odo. "I expect you know the American services as well as you do rood-screens. Wish you'd come and have some singles. Ever see the Dohertys play? When I was up at Wimbledon

once, by Jove, they did play. Style! Wish I had the time to go in for it regularly!"

"Odo!" said Joan admonishingly.

"Well, of course, I mean if I hadn't felt that I ought to be a clergyman," said Odo, somewhat abashed. But he began to talk about lawn-tennis again almost immediately, in spite of the visible frown on Joan's face. It was painfully worldly of him, she thought, and she was afraid Mr. Illingborough—in spite of knowing about rood-screens—was not a good influence.

CHAPTER XI

A JUDGE IN DIFFICULTIES

ILLINGBOROUGH had come up from an afternoon bathe into the garden, and he was pacing up and down until tea should be ready.

It was to be early, for after it Jocelyne had promised to accompany him to St. Nicholas Morton. Looking at his watch, he saw that it would be ready in about ten minutes, if punctuality prevailed. In the meantime, he had plenty to occupy him with his thoughts. He was puzzled.

He had approached his task, which he knew to be a difficult one, in all humility. Only slowly, and by the exercise of much thought and observation could he expect to unravel some of the amazing complexities of the female mind. Even then, perfect comprehension was not to be looked for, or complete justice to be done. He was bound to remain only partially satisfied.

But now that he had been several days at the Sea House, he had begun to realise that this satisfaction—

the satisfaction that springs from the knowledge of having come to grips with his problem—was more partial than he had expected. He had not come to grips with his problem. The solution seemed to be sliding away from him, and the more comparisons he made, the less light was vouchsafed to him. Joan indeed was practically out of the competition, and perhaps her elimination amounted to something accomplished. On the question of her incompetence he was scarcely doubtful. In the sort of mental notes that he had started to make, there had been set down under the heading “Joan”—

“Self-conceit,”

“Want of sympathy,”

“Ignorance.”

The owner of these qualities could under no circumstances be recommended to Mr. Mortlake. It was not as though Mr. Mortlake aspired to the society of one of his nieces in order to effect their moral reform. The reason for his desiring Illingborough to choose one might have been obscured—for a technical purpose, so to speak—but Illingborough was too candid not to recognise that a fortune in all probability awaited the chosen one.

Well, self-conceit, want of sympathy, and ignorance are not qualities that prevent people from making

fortunes, but then money-making is not even in our day a complete test of virtue. The methods that lead a man to a fortune or to a prison cell are too similar in so many cases for them to be accepted as ideal.

Joan then was out of it, unless a miracle happened ; and the choice lay between Jocelyne and Anne. What bewildered Illingborough was that while everything that could be set down to the moral credit of a human being seemed properly to belong under the heading "Jocelyne," Anne was making the more headway in his estimation. How ? Why ? Illingborough could not see. Under "Jocelyne " he could fairly and without bias write down—

"Graciousness,"

"Sympathy,"

"Culture (of a limited kind),"

"Intelligence,"

"Amiability,"

together with such minor qualities, not to be reckoned perhaps as virtues, but undoubtedly enhancing the value of a person to the social scheme, as—

"Conversational powers,"

"Quickness of perception,"

"Charm."

It was a powerful list, and not to be really weakened

by the fact that once or twice Jocelyne had let fall petty, and Illingborough even fancied spiteful, remarks; and had displayed at times a curious lethargy. Illingborough was disposed to condone these fallings off from complete grace. Women were weak creatures physically, and perhaps she had had neuralgia at the time. Illingborough came to the conclusion that she must have had neuralgia.

When it came to Anne's account, a very different state of affairs was revealed.

“ Brusqueness (amounting to rudeness),” and
 : “ Candour (amounting to cynicism),”

are obviously vices rather than virtues, and they had to head the list. Against them what was to be set? She also might be granted intelligence (in the midst of amazing ignorance) tempered by brusqueness. But besides that what was there? Could one in estimating—even on paper—a person's character put down—

“ Horse-management,”

“ Ability to bait one's own hook with lob-worms,”

“ Devotion of knife-boy.”

The first would perhaps increase the credit of a coachman, the second of a fisherman. Neither could be reckoned as qualities necessary to an heiress.

Tom's devotion was another matter no doubt, but again could hardly be considered a satisfactory guarantee of moral worth. Tom was an eccentric urchin with an intense love of sport which somehow he found impersonated in Anne. To see Miss Anne high-diving was his ideal of pleasure, and artful swimmers and riders would be the first admitted to his Utopia. Obviously Tom was prejudiced.

As he strode up and down, experiencing in all probability more than the usual difficulties that beset a judge, Illingborough by the merest accident found himself confronted with yet another prejudiced witness, namely, Mrs. Odler. She, happening to catch sight of Illingborough's shadow, as he strolled up and down on the other side of the yard gate, and taking it to be Tom's, called out to him to come and pump. As Tom did not respond, being in truth asleep in another part of the garden, she raised her voice—

"Now, you idle boy, are you a-comen or not to this here pump. If 'ee don't, not a bite o' tea will you have."

"I'll come certainly then," said Illingborough, stepping up to the kitchen door with a smile.

Mrs. Odler was overcome with confusion.

"Well I never, I beg yer pardon, sir, I'm sure, for I did think the shadder was Tom's."

"Tom couldn't throw such a fat one," said Illingborough. "At least he'd say so."

"Oh, I'm sure fat it wasn't," said Mrs. Odler politely, "and I hope you'll forgive me."

"If you'll let me do the pumping," said Illingborough.

"Never, indeed, sir, I couldn't."

"I should like to. I've never pumped in my life, but it looks jolly. I'm going to. It's no good saying I mayn't."

Illingborough pumped till he was purple in the face, and Mrs. Odler had to get him a glass of water to ward off a fit.

"Whatever'll Miss Anne say, if she knows," she said as she watched him drink it.

"What should Miss Anne say?" asked Illingborough.

"Why allowing of a gent to work hisself 'plectic."

"I expect she would say it shows he needed exercise," said Illingborough.

"I'm sure she'd ha' rather done it herself," protested Mrs. Odler. "She do at times when that boy's idled his time and left it, and easily she kin do it too."

"It's very hard work for a woman," said Illingborough, scandalised.

"Not for the strong ones," said Mrs. Odler.

“Wimmen ain’t such weaklings as some men think. I worked as hard as any man when I was a gal. My father, he allus said as a woman should hold her own with any man, chopping and pumping. He held that no woman was fit to marry—not less she could bake a batch o’ bread, and carry a good bundle o’ wood, and make a man’s shirt. Nowadays gals is so delicate there’s no gotten ’em to do nothing. O’ course it’s diff’rent with young ladies—but even then they’d be better if they was liker Miss Anne.”

“As physically strong, you mean?” said Illingborough.

“As physercally sensible,” said Mrs. Odler.

He was not quite sure what she meant, and she was not—he found—great at elucidating what she regarded as a very simple statement. He had to think it out for himself when he had finished his pumping and begun strolling again; and he decided that it must be a dialect version of the old-time line about *mens sana in corpore sano*. Certainly Anne had a sane body, and it might perhaps be added to the list of her virtues. Only, one could not argue from the sane body to the sane mind. Otherwise his choice would be made. At least—would it? Jocelyne, too, for that matter, was healthy enough, and for physical grace, she and Anne were a pair. Illingborough had never found himself dwelling overmuch

on the physical grace of women before, and it was Mrs. Odler's words that set him going on that tack. He fancied that Jocelyne's was an indoor and Anne's an outdoor beauty. A painter would have shown Jocelyne sitting or leaning or lying pillowed, but Anne about to run or mount or dive.

Was this outdoor grace—which charmed Tom—also the quality which charmed Mrs. Odler? And was it—could it be—beginning to charm him? Illingborough felt uneasy at the notion. Charms are dangerous things. True, he had in his mental list allowed "Charm" to Jocelyne—as one of the minor virtues or graces which are—as a philosopher has said—the bloom on the face of life. But by charm he meant something definite—something that would be admitted to be agreeable by any disinterested observer. He meant by it, as any other person might mean, a gracious manner of doing and saying things, which pleased without throwing spells. It cast no spells upon him. Anne's charm, if she had it, was something much more elusive. It was something he could neither weigh nor measure. Was it fair to put "Charm" on Anne's list, or should it rather be ruled out because of its elusiveness, as belonging to what the lawyers call inadmissible evidence?

Illingborough decided that it was inadmissible, and must be rejected. The trouble was that it would make

itself heard within his mind. It had no respect for the Court of Reason, as long as he strolled up and down there in the sun. He took out his watch again.

Why did not Jocelyne come down? She had said tea at four o'clock, and it was already nearly half-past. Of course unpunctuality was not a vice, but it was a pity that Jocelyne should be unpunctual just when Illingborough needed exercise to drive out his doubts with regard to her superiority.

If he could have seen her, at the moment, his doubts would have been increased rather than left floating. She was lying on her bed, frowning at a page of the *Guide to Porton Langley and Neighbourhood*, which contained an account of St. Nicholas Morton. She was frowning partly at the architectural descriptions of it—which she was committing to heart—partly at the whole trouble of having to go. That seemed inevitable. She had postponed the walk as often as possible, but there were limits probably even to Mr. Illingborough's patience. If she excused herself again, he could hardly fail to think her rude. She was not sure that that mattered. She could not keep up the angelic pose for ever; her feet tired on that pedestal. It was one thing to accept his admiration, but if the retention of it meant going out of her way to appear charitable and intellectual and all the rest of it, well, then, she was not going to bother to retain it.

She supposed, however, that she would have to do St. Nicholas Morton.

“ ‘Over the choir stalls hangs a banner said to have been captured single-handed by Sir John Corlande at the battle of——’ What rot ! ” said Jocelyne, and threw the book down with a yawn. She knew enough now to save herself from anything very terrible in the way of ignorance, and to chat with a certain appearance of interest.

She came down a few minutes later in a white frock, which conveyed to her mind a note of innocence, and she hoped would to Illingborough, and she made the most graceful apologies.

“ I’m afraid you’ll think me most untrustworthy,” she said. “ But I had to dust the china in the drawing-room this afternoon.”

“ Not at all,” said Illingborough, quite accepting the explanation, and ashamed of himself for being impatient. “ I hope I haven’t caused you to hurry.”

“ Oh no,” said Jocelyne—“ only a very little. I wish I could have left it. But father is so very particular about it.”

“ Really ? ” said Illingborough, with the least tinge of surprise. He had unavoidably taken notes of Mr. Wetherborne.

Though Jocelyne could not resist the habit of strengthening her position even at the risk of plausi-

bility, still she was also very quick to see when she had made a mistake.

"It is the one thing father is particular about," she proceeded, having observed the slight lift of Illingborough's brow.

"I see," said Illingborough, reassured.

"And now we must have tea at once," she said. "Oh—how vexatious—visitors," she added a moment later as the gate banged outside. "It's nobody to stop for, I hope," she continued, perceptibly brightening.

"It's your sister," said Illingborough, looking out of the window, "and Mr. Odo Watterly, and somebody else."

"I wonder who that can be," said Jocelyne. She sat gracefully at the tea-table busy with the copper-kettle which was singing over the methylated spirits. Her wonder, if it was genuine, was satisfied a moment later when Joan walked into the room followed by Clifford and Odo. "It's Mr. Clifford," she said.

"I hope I've not hit the wrong time," said Clifford. "I met these people on their way here, so I ventured to come along with them."

"Well, I don't know that you haven't," said Jocelyne, beaming on him. "You'll have to ask Mr. Illingborough that."

Clifford turned politely.

"Is that so?" he said.

"Miss Wetherborne and I were going for a walk to St. Nicholas Morton," said Illingborough.

"We could do it another day instead, couldn't we?" said Jocelyne quickly.

"Don't stop for me," said Clifford. "Really, I mean it. I shall be awfully vexed if I put you off."

"What do you think, Mr. Illingborough?" said Jocelyne.

"Oh, by all means postpone it," said Illingborough. But it was only the polite exterior Illingborough that spoke. Inwardly he failed to see why Clifford's intrusion should stop them.

CHAPTER XII

A WALK POSTPONED

CLIFFORD had not so far made many mistakes in the conduct of his plot, but he made one by coming over that afternoon. He had some excuse. Plotting, which is supposed to supply in excitement what it fails to give in the way of ordinary amenities, can be excessively dull. For some days past he had found it so.

For one thing, if his plot were ripening, it was not ripening particularly fast. Indeed, he was not in a position to be sure that it was ripening at all. For another, the necessity of waiting and gaping in Porton Langley, dependent upon Miss Maine's chatter for his indoor amusement and upon Jocelyne's whims for an outing, was more than he had bargained for. He hated solitude, and neither the sea nor the country gave him anything but the gloomiest feelings.

These he could have borne with, if the certainty of success had been with him. His intensest disgust was due to the fact that he could place no such reliance

upon the future. That depended partly upon Jocelyne, partly upon that fool Illingborough. "That fool Illingborough" was the phrase he used to himself now, whenever he thought of his old schoolfellow. It implied some bitterness as well as a great deal of scorn. The two had re-met at the Sea House, and to tell the truth, Illingborough had not shown himself so delighted to renew his old acquaintanceship as Clifford had supposed he would be. Or if he had been, he had not demonstrated the fact. He was polite. He would be that in any case. But he had not shown himself the meek persuadable person Clifford had expected. He appeared to have forgotten that he was a mere kid when Clifford had been an important member of their old school. On the other hand, he seemed to have remembered that Clifford had left that establishment under a cloud. There was a squeamish, priggish manner about him that was infinitely annoying. He had the audacity to behave coolly.

If Clifford could have been certain that Illingborough's coolness was due to jealousy he would have been delighted. It would have shown that matters were moving the right way. But though Jocelyne coquettishly hinted at her conquest of Illingborough, Clifford was not sure that she did not exaggerate the impression she had made. He felt

vaguely that she did not really understand Illingborough. He was not by any means so simple as he looked, and though Jocelyne might be right in supposing that he had begun by admiring her, she was wrong in supposing that his admiration would continue without criticism. The fool was not of the lapdog order of young men, who like to be played with. Yet Jocelyne was decidedly playing with him, and posing for him.

It was to decide whether, if things went on in this way, Illingborough would make the decision he must somehow or other soon make, that Clifford had walked over that afternoon, and he saw at once that Jocelyne, in making his presence an excuse for not taking the walk to St. Nicholas Morton, was doing the worst thing possible. Illingborough's manner, more than ordinarily polite, showed it. Jocelyne quite failed to realise this.

"Yes—another time would do equally well," she said. "We might go to-morrow, mightn't we, Mr. Illingborough?"

"I say, you're not forgetting our tennis squash, are you?" broke in Odo beseechingly. He was standing by the table ready to hand cups.

"Is that to-morrow?" said Jocelyne, as though her engagements were many and forgettable.

"Yes—and I've been rolling the lawn for hours.

Talk of galley - slaving. Do you play, Mr. Clifford ? ”

“ I used to,” said Clifford. “ I haven’t played this season.”

“ Hope you’ll begin with us then,” said Odo politely. “ Has my mother sent you an invite ? No—I expect you haven’t met. I’ll send one off when I get back. But come anyhow. Do ! ”

“ I shall be delighted,” said Clifford. It was worth while getting in with the rectory people, he thought ; and if he could only induce Jocelyne not to cut her walk, his arrival would not be so inopportune after all. The difficulty of persuading a person who can see no reason for a plan is, however, rendered twice as difficult if you cannot communicate the reason to them, as Clifford could not. Joan was feeling this difficulty at the moment, when by winks and frowns she was trying to convey to the innocent Odo that his mother would not particularly approve of the invitation he had issued to Mr. Clifford.

“ Have I done anything ? ” said Odo, bewildered by these mysterious signs.

“ You’ve talked so much,” said Joan, “ that the tea’s begun to get cold.”

“ Oh, I say—I’m awfully sorry,” he said, hurrying to her, with a cup, the sugar and the milk jug, so vigorously that he spilt the first two. Clifford took

advantage of the opportunity afforded by his self-execrations and pursuit of fallen lumps of sugar to approach Jocelyne.

"I hope you'll take this walk," he said in a low tone.

"Why?" said Jocelyne.

"I'd like it."

"Rather than that I should stay here and perhaps walk back with you?"

"Yes."

Jocelyne flushed. It was insulting of him to say such a thing. What did he mean by it? More than once of late he had hinted at a wish that she should try and please Mr. Illingborough. Did he intend to throw her over? He professed still to admire her, but a girl's admirer is not the person to challenge her to show that she is not doing all she can to retain the admiration of a third person. She would have liked to say something horrid to Clifford, but could not think of anything, and decided to pass on the provocation to Illingborough, whose fault it was ultimately that she herself had been so provoked.

"Mr. Illingborough," she called out across the low tea-table, "Mr. Clifford is so anxious to get rid of me that perhaps we had better take our tiresome walk after all."

"I couldn't think," said Illingborough quickly, "of asking you to go for any walk likely to tire you."

Clifford laughed uneasily.

"That's Miss Wetherborne's way of putting it," he said. "She really means that she's longing to take it. Only, she's such a hostess that she doesn't like to leave a guest, even if he has come just at the wrong time."

It didn't sound very plausible to Clifford himself, but Illingborough's modesty appeared to make him think he must have been wrong.

"In that case I must apologise to Miss Wetherborne for making a mistake," he said.

Just for a moment it seemed to Clifford that he had saved the situation. He had not reckoned with Jocelyne's injured feelings and her habit—not to be conquered at a critical moment—of behaving like an ill-tempered child when she felt like one.

"I didn't mean that," she said pettishly. "And it will be too late for the walk now."

"Where to?—St. Nicholas Morton?" asked Odo, who did not understand quite what was going on. "Plenty of time to get there still, if you're keen on it. It's only five o'clock."

"I'm not keen on it," she said. She could see Clifford frowning, and she was the more determined to make herself disagreeable. "There is nothing I should dislike more than a walk this evening"

"Or any other time," said Joan audibly. She

had a great contempt for childish and objectless displays of temper. Her own exhibitions, though rarer, were a great deal more effective. She felt that Jocelyne was merely silly, especially when she snapped back.

"I didn't ask you to speak, Joan."

"Still, you know you hate walks—except to Porton Langley," answered Joan in her matter-of-fact voice, than which nothing could be more infuriating.

It was Odo who saved Jocelyne from exhibiting herself in a still worse light.

"Well, it's quite flat, Mr. Illingborough," he said, in his jolly good-natured way, "that Jocelyne's off it. But if you feel like going yourself, and don't mind taking me instead, there's nothing I'd like more. Want some ekker badly."

"It's awfully kind of you," said Illingborough. "Are you sure it's not too late?"

"Positive. Isn't that so, Mr. Wetherborne," he continued, as that elegant gentleman strolled into the room at that moment for, as he announced, a cup of tea.

"Isn't what so, Odo?" asked Mr. Wetherborne amiably. "Ah, Clifford, how are you? Most enterprising of you to come over; I should have found it too hot myself. What is this matter, Odo, that you

want my opinion upon ? I must ask for a rather more lucid explanation."

"Why," said Odo, "Mr. Illingborough and I are going over to St. Nicholas Morton, and Jocelyne thinks there isn't time. What do you say ?"

"Ah, well," Mr. Wetherborne shook his head and helped himself to cream. "Jocelyne, I expect, is like her father—not a great walker. In my young days we never walked. A ride perhaps—or a drive with a smart pair—tandem—we might have considered. But a walk ! I don't know how it was, but in the days I am talking of we hardly considered walking quite gentlemanly."

It was not a helpful contribution to the discussion, and Odo said they must have been spoilt in Mr. Wetherborne's young days.

"What about ekker ?" he wanted to know.

"Perhaps we did not want it in the same way," said Mr. Wetherborne, shaking his head again. "We made a greater point of being gentlemanly."

A want of relevancy about Mr. Wetherborne's method prevented Odo from replying to his criticism—if it was a criticism—but he confided to Illingborough, when they had started a few minutes later, that there must have been a good deal of rot about the gentlemen of those days. Illingborough agreed. He did not enlarge upon the matter, because he

could only have done so hotly, and Mr. Wetherborne was in a sense his host. The walk was not quite the pleasure he had expected. Odo, though good-natured in the extreme, was too matter-of-fact a companion for such a scene as that fine Norman church presented in the yellowy light that evening. And Illingborough himself could not give it all the attention that it deserved. Miss Wetherborne's petulancy kept recurring to him; and also those words of Mr. Wetherborne's: "Jocelyne is, I expect, like her father."

He could not accept that statement as a whole. With all possible respect to Mr. Wetherborne, he hoped it was an exaggeration. But even if she were a little like Mr. Wetherborne, it would be a pity. He felt most discouraged about his prospects of judging.

CHAPTER XIII

PROLEGOMENA TO A GARDEN PARTY

IT was the afternoon of Mrs. Watterly's garden party, a few minutes before the guests were expected. On the rectory lawn, a fine piece of turf, green and smooth, with the court-lines beautifully white and staring, and the net stretched taut, Odo was visible going through some final evolutions with the roller. Chairs and tables were dotted about under the big copper-beech fronting the house ; and, to the left of this tree, on a nice slopy piece of grass, between the little geometrically shaped beds where geraniums, lobelias, and such summer flowers had been planted out, a suitable golf-clock awaited the competition of such guests as did not play tennis, but required mild amusement. In the rector's study, which looked out upon this prospect, the usual litter of books and papers had been tidied up, and the writing-table groaned with dishes of cakes and strawberries, which, from this point of vantage, could most easily be carried into the garden when the time for such refreshment should arrive.

The study also contained the rector—brushed and burnished—and Mrs. Watterly, looking what it would be no exaggeration to call smart, in a grey silk dress with white spots (modistes the Mesdames Estelle).

The slightly wrinkled condition of the rector's brow might be ascribed partly to the unwonted and festive condition of his study, which carried with it a suggestion of pamphlets tidied away, and manuscripts removed, and perhaps lost for ever ; partly to the fact that Mrs. Watterly, having tired herself out with preparations for making her friends and acquaintances enjoy themselves, was suffering from a reaction which caused her own state to be sad and even complaining.

" Unless people come," she had just said to her husband, " and realise what I am giving this party for, and make some return for it, which everybody is so ready not to do, all my trouble will be wasted."

" Exactly what are you giving it for ? " asked the rector, who personally saw no return that would compensate him for having his study turned into a strawberry bed. " I understood that it was, in its original conception, a matter of hospitality."

" Of course it was, John," said Mrs. Watterly—darting to and fro as she spoke, and poking away anything dusty that had escaped her previous clearance.

" For hospitality," said the rector, trying not to see

what was happening to all that he most valued
“one does not in theory expect any return.”

“It depends on what you mean by return.”

“No doubt. The feeling of virtue engendered by”—
his eye wandered over the strawberries—“going to a
good deal of trouble on behalf of one’s neighbours is—
or to speak exactly, should be—its own reward.”

“Of course it should be,” said Mrs. Watterly.
“But besides that one naturally expects that people
will be a little grateful. Please put that disreputable
dictionary away, John. Any drawer will do, though I
should have thought the kitchen fire was the most
suitable place.”

“People will be a little grateful—yes!” said the
rector, hastily hiding the tome.

“And, as a consequence, try to do the same for us,”
said Mrs. Watterly, beating several MS. books together
outside the window, and then concealing them under
the mat in front of the fireplace.

“Do I understand then,” said the rector patiently,
“that you have suddenly developed an enthusiasm
for lawn-tennis, and wish to be invited to some similar
entertainments?”

“Why be absurd, John,” said Mrs. Watterly; who
was now very very hot. “You know, so far as I am
concerned, I do not care about going out much—I
have quite enough calling and visiting to do to please

me. But Odo is another matter. What I'm anxious to do is to let people know that Odo is back for his holiday."

"And get him invited out?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is no harm in that," said the rector placably.

Mrs. Watterly sniffed.

"I think the harm is that we should have to do so much to let people know that poor Odo is here. I think the people round are horribly inhospitable in that way."

"Oh, I don't know," said the rector. "I shouldn't say that."

"I do say it," said Mrs. Watterly. "And how among such an unenterprising and dull and selfish lot of neighbours poor Odo is ever to have a chance of finding a wife, I cannot see. Please get out of the way."

The rector sat down. It seemed the safest thing to do. Otherwise it looked as if he might be swept under the mat or into a drawer for the afternoon. Besides, the conversation had now arrived at a point at which it was very evident that he could give no assistance.

"A wife? I didn't know you had begun to think of that," he said.

"I have," said Mrs. Watterly. "And I begin very seriously to wish that you had never settled here."

Want of foresight may be a matter for regret, but Mr. Watterly could hardly be expected to feel guilty over the fact that, when he had accepted his present living, he had not foreseen the possibility of there being a lack of marriageable young women in the neighbourhood some six-and-twenty years afterwards. Yet this was the charge, it seemed, that Mrs. Watterly was bringing against him.

"My dear," he said mildly, and not without humour, "when I was offered Mazinghope six-and-twenty years ago, the question hardly arose. Odo—to put the matter shortly—was not."

"Still," persisted Mrs. Watterly, "we might have——" she paused delicately, and shook out her duster.

"Anticipated Odo?"

"Really, John," said Mrs. Watterly, blushing. "I am surprised at you—the rector—allowing yourself to—to express yourself like that."

"To paraphrase certain matters is not a simple task," said the rector genially. "And in any case, my dear, does regret avail, assuming your argument *re* the scarcity of damsels to be correct?"

"I suppose regret doesn't do any good," said Mrs. Watterly. "But it is annoying. I cannot help feeling that."

"Are there no damsels in Manchester—by the

rivers—ha—of Pharpar and Abana—whom Odo could select from ? ” inquired the rector, but with a manly indifference to the subject of match-making for which his wife could have shaken him.

“ You don’t understand,” she said. “ In Manchester Odo is working hard all the time—as the bishop advised him to do. He is, so to speak, under the bishop’s guidance.”

“ But when the bishop is away—— ? ”

“ Odo would be too proud to spend any of his precious time in social doings. He has put his shoulder to the plough. And in any case he lives in too poor a part to meet any girl worthy of his consideration. Besides, Odo is not pushing. He is not a carpet-priest.”

“ Quite right, quite right.”

“ It isn’t quite right,” said Mrs. Watterly. “ I mean that, of course, it’s quite right of Odo to devote himself to his work, but when the poor boy is back here for his holidays—only four Sundays, John—he ought to see some society.”

“ I should have thought,” said the rector, trying hard to be interested, “ that he had been seeing a good deal of that little Wetherborne girl.”

“ Exactly,” Mrs. Watterly stopped dusting in her excitement at hearing him make a sensible remark.

“That child, for she is no more, absolutely pursues the poor boy. Under a cloak of enthusiasm for church work which I regard as impertinent—and I wonder you put up with it, John, seeing it’s only result is meddling and mischief—she follows Odo about. What is bound to be the result ? ”

“I should think either Odo would get pretty sick of her or——”

“Exactly—or the poor generous boy will probably be trapped.”

“Trapped ? ”

“Into an engagement with her. Can’t you see her object ? She is a child, but a cunning one. Cunning is in the family. Jocelyne is a trifle worse than Joan if possible, and I doubt if Mr. Wetherborne knows what the truth is. It is into that family that you, John, are willing that your only son should marry.”

“Nothing of the kind. It never entered my thoughts,” protested the rector.

“Your thoughts ! ” Mrs. Watterly smiled tragically. “Odo might be married without disturbing your thoughts, John. But perhaps you see now why I am trying to get some other girls here for the boy to see and, I hope, to visit.”

“And possibly to marry ? ”

“One of them possibly.”

The rector smiled. It was the eternal feminine motive—at the matronly stage of existence.

“ Well, well,” he said. “ Not being a Moslem, Odo cannot have more than one. But who is that one to be ? One of the Pollendons ? ”

Again Mrs. Watterly wanted to shake him for his masculine indifference.

“ Really, John ! The Pollendons are retired green-grocers. Mr. Pollendon made boots or something in the Midlands before he came here.”

“ A mixed store, no doubt,” said the rector.

“ You have no pride if you wish to mix your blood with the Pollendons.”

The rector could bear much for the sake of peace, but this accusation was unjust.

“ I don’t as a matter of fact wish to mix my blood with anybody’s,” he said dryly. “ So far as I am concerned, my dear, there is no hurry whatever about Odo’s marrying. I merely inquired because from your manner I thought you must have some young lady in your eye, and you wanted me to know of it.”

It was this ramming home of facts that more than anything else made Mr. Watterly at times the despair of his wife.

“ I have no intention,” she said, with dignity, “ of providing Odo with a wife. He will, as you say, choose for himself. But we may at least see

that he has some opportunities. What I thought was that if Lady Start comes this afternoon, as she has promised to do, and brings her niece from London——”

“Her nephew, you mean, don’t you? Captain What’s-his-name.”

“Both are staying with her,” said Mrs. Watterly.
“Miss Irene Hatton is pretty sure to come.”

“And see and conquer—and be conquered?”

“It is not out of the question.”

“High game, my dear,” said the rector.

“I don’t know about that,” said Mrs. Watterly.
“Lady Start is very democratic. Too much so in my opinion. Considering that she once confided to me that she would not mind if her nephew were to fancy Anne Wetherborne—a girl like that——”

“I see—*a fortiori*—Q.E.D.,” said the rector, rising.
“Well I shall go out and congratulate Odo. And take a turn with the roller perhaps. He must not look too hot when the young lady arrives. One cannot, I understand, look both hot and interesting.”

“I hope you won’t say or do anything silly—or put the boy against it.”

“On the contrary, I shall promise him a fortune, and the young lady a bishopric—provided they do not request me to have strawberries in my study again.”

The rector strolled out, and Mrs. Watterly looked after him worriedly. How little, she thought, can men sympathise with their wives. East and West are not further asunder on certain points. The sound of carriage wheels entering the drive caused her to conceal her duster hastily and to compose her features to a smile.

CHAPTER XIV

A MATCH IS PLAYED AND HINTED AT

"THIS ought to make a good sett," said Lady Start, adjusting her lorgnettes upon the lithe figure of Odo Watterly, who was engaged at the moment in handing balls to his partner.

"Oh, charming!" said Mrs. Watterly.

The charm to her eyes was that Odo and Miss Hatton were to play together—against Anne and Captain Hatton. Anne looked nice in a white frock, but she had not the air of Miss Hatton. Mrs. Watterly decided that the air was due partly to the consciousness of superiority, partly to Miss Hatton's striking blondness. Odo was dark. But it did not matter in a man. He looked better than Captain Hatton, who was well built, but might be stout some day. Odo would never be stout, especially if he ran about as much as he had done that afternoon. He was as fresh as ever, though he had played several games already and handed tea assiduously. Mrs. Watterly was glad tea was over, and that her party was going so well. It

certainly was. The golf-clock had become a little centre of hits and misses, the rector was conducting parties of guests round the rose and vegetable gardens, naming roses to enthusiastic inquirers, quite regardless of the labels affixed to them (and which in most cases gave a different version), and pointing out with pride his cucumbers and young tomatoes ; and now this desirable sett had been arranged and was about to be played.

Mrs. Watterly felt that nothing but genial conversation was required from her.

"Lawn-tennis is always such a pretty game to watch," she observed as Miss Hatton began serving.

"When the play is pretty," said Lady Start, sitting back. She and Mrs. Watterly were seated side by side on the bench of honour under the copper beech, with other people at no great distance, the nearest being Illingborough, hugging his knees on the grass.

"Of course," said Mrs. Watterly. "But it so often is."

"I wish I could agree with you," said Lady Start. She was a little stout woman, advanced in years, but with the face and almost the dress of a child. She also had the candour of a child and a boy's pugnacity. Probably she would have been happiest in defending her castle against the Roundheads, as an ancestor had done. But she derived a good deal of pleasure

from routing people in conversation. Therefore, when Mrs. Watterly, to whom lawn-tennis was a series of bewildering evolutions, with little point to any of them, and whose one anxiety was that Odo should distinguish himself without getting too hot, attempted to defend her position by stating that—at least—Miss Hatton was a very brilliant player, Lady Start bore down upon her.

“Irene is not so bad as some,” she said. “Most of the play this afternoon has been appalling. I do not know what English men and girls are coming to.”

“Really,” said Mrs. Watterly deprecatingly. There were so many within earshot, and Lady Start did talk so audibly.

“It is not only that they cannot take a fine game seriously as they do on the Continent, but they cannot even attempt it on occasions gracefully. They look as if their legs and arms did not belong to them. Yet they consider themselves athletic.”

“Such a mistake, perhaps,” murmured Mrs. Watterly.

“A mistake if they cannot act up to it. In our day, Mrs. Watterly”—Lady Start was some twenty years older than Mrs. Watterly, but she preferred to generalise—“we did not affect athleticism. We belonged to a generation that took no exercise, but held itself straight and looked graceful. I do not see

any result from this outdoor life—except longer feet.”

“Yet small sizes in shoes are still obtainable,” said Mrs. Watterly. “I had a catalogue the other day. Actually there were Two’s to be had.”

“There are all sorts of silly things to be had by those who will pay for them and suffer for them,” said Lady Start. “That does not alter my contention that modern young people are most ungainly. I believe that if I took one of those racquets into my hand, and tried to hit one of those balls, I should look more graceful than any of the girls I have seen playing.”

“I’m sure you would,” said Mrs. Watterly.

But just as soldiers are rarely enamoured of peace, so Lady Start hated to be agreed with. She looked about her for a possible foe.

“What do you say, Mr.—Mr.?” She turned on Illingborough — the only person properly within reach.

“Mr. Illingborough,” said Mrs. Watterly.

“What does Mr. Illingborough think, then?” said Lady Start.

It is possible that she had all along had the intention of drawing him into conversation with her, and she loved to test people with pouncing remarks. Illingborough, who had been attracted by her in the midst

of the somewhat formal speech of the other guests, rose to the occasion.

"I am certain you would excel at anything you tried," he said.

Lady Start smiled, for fighters love courtesies.

"Now that's nice," she said. "Here is a young man who can be quite polite to an old woman without being stupid, and I don't know him. Why is that?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure," said Mrs. Watterly.

"But it's curious," insisted Lady Start.

"Perhaps," said Illingborough, quoting a modern poet, "The explanation is that I 'not only don't deserve success, But haven't managed to achieve it.'"

"Oh!" said the lady, smiling. "Go on! Where do you come from?"

"London."

"I don't like Londoners," said Lady Start. "Couldn't you have come from any other place?"

"Oh, I think some London people are nice," said Mrs. Watterly, afraid that Illingborough would be crushed by Lady Start's displeasure. "Many of the people who come for the hunting seem quite pleasant. And of course it is difficult to—to decide for oneself where one is to come from."

"That is true," said Lady Start. "I shall forgive Mr. Illingborough under the circumstances, especially as he has come to these parts now."

"Only on a visit, I believe," said Mrs. Watterly.

"I am afraid so," said Illingborough.

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Sea House."

Lady Start's smiles were exchanged for a frown.

"You don't mean to say you are the Wetherbornes' lodger? I heard of it. I quite disapprove. They don't need a lodger, and I think it is very silly of them to have one."

"I thought it was very kind," said Illingborough, with great temerity, Mrs. Watterly thought.

"You would. But what do girls want with a young man lodger?"

"I am staying with Mr. Wetherborne," said Illingborough gravely. He disapproved of innuendoes even from an old lady, and his face showed it.

"Hoity-toity!" said Lady Start. "You'll be saying, 'Hold your tongue' next, I suppose. I never did. And I said you were a polite young man!"

"I hope I have not been rude," said Illingborough.

"Oh, you hope!" said Lady Start, and proceeded in a very aggrieved way, "I suppose I'm not at liberty to criticise the domestic economy of young women whom I have known from their cradles, and I mayn't even decide where a stranger is to take up his abode."

"Mr. Illingborough didn't mean that, I'm sure," said Mrs. Watterly.

"I don't know what he meant. He glared at me," said Lady Start. "And I won't be glared at. You are a very fierce young man, Mr. Illingborough, and I shall only ask you to my tennis party on Wednesday if you promise not to glare."

"I'll try not to," said Illingborough.

"Then I shall try and forget your tigerish scowl," said Lady Start. She turned to Mrs. Watterly, who had got up from her seat nervously, as one who fears to be crushed between two buffers. "It's all right now—if you were thinking of deserting me," she said; "I still feel shaky, but as he's promised not to do it again, I shan't be afraid to be left."

"I was only just going to speak to one of the servants," said Mrs. Watterly, hesitating.

"Very well. I'll scream if I'm frightened," said Lady Start, "and then you'll come back, won't you? Now," she said to Illingborough, as Mrs. Watterly trotted off, "the first thing you may tell me is—what you think of them?"

"The Misses Wetherborne?" said Illingborough.

"Yes."

"They are very charming."

Lady Start pouted.

"I thought you were a conversationalist, Mr.

Illingborough. I am not asking you to repeat the Shorter Catechism. I am interested in these girls."

Illingborough smiled.

"I am afraid I am horribly deceptive without meaning to be. I can't talk in the way you mean. I'm really awfully dull, and find it very difficult to put things into words. The fact is——"

"I begin to think you do prefer quantity to quality," said Lady Start. "But it doesn't matter—if you're not unstoppable. And I don't really think you are. I am. We ought to get on rather nicely together. Do you think they're pretty?"

"Yes."

"Lovely?"

"Miss Wetherborne and Miss Anne Wetherborne might be so described."

"Not Joan, of course. Squat little creature. Rather my own figure at that age. With luck she may grow out of it too. No compliments, please," she added as Illingborough's face expressed doubt as to whether he had heard correctly. "You think they're both lovely? Well, which is the more so of the two?"

"I shouldn't like to have to decide," said Illingborough, though such a decision would have been, he felt, easier than the one he had to make.

"My nephew, Captain Hatton thinks there is no

doubt about the matter. But then he isn't fit to judge. He's prejudiced. He came down—I don't know why I should be telling you this, but then it's perfectly obvious—and I never could keep a secret—simply to see her again."

Lady Start had mentioned no names, and Illingborough had just said he would not like to have to decide. Yet he was conscious of a feeling of intolerable discomfort as a result of what the old lady had just said. Why should Captain Hatton, a fine-looking man, and by no means unintelligent, have no doubts in his mind? And what was his certainty? Illingborough could not rest without knowing.

"May I ask, if it is not a secret, which your nephew admires more?"

"Look at him!"

Anne was serving and Captain Hatton, standing at the net, had his eyes on her. Experts maintain that server's partner should watch the ball from the start, and that might account for the captain's gaze. Only—did a tennis ball ever attract such fervid attention? She was good to look at, cool and fresh in her white frock. Captain Hatton himself was red in the face and damp, and even the leaner Odo was mopping himself with a handkerchief, having bounced about in the alertest manner, taking brilliant shots of his own and apologising breathlessly for missing.

his partner's. Her air—which Mrs. Watterly had so much admired—had degenerated into one of statuesque fatigue—which made her look rather cross, and made Odo feel guilty, though indeed she was only too winded to utter her forgiveness for his comparatively few errors.

How lightly Anne moved! Now she was smiling and making one of her brief quaint answers to something Captain Hatton had just said to her. What had he said? She was serving again now—and Lady Start was talking.

“Absolutely *épris*! Yet he is a man who has seen a good deal of the world and a good many of the girls in it. Malta, Simla, London. You would not somehow expect it of him. As Irene says, she is so unlike a woman of the world. A Patience in many ways. Gilbert and Sullivan's, I mean. ‘I cannot tell what this love may be, that cometh to all and not to me.’” Lady Start fluted the sweet absurdity in a little high voice that showed she had sung once. “You prefer the sister, I suppose?” she demanded.

Illingborough did not reply at once. The words the old lady had just rehearsed ran in his head. They were part of a burlesque, and meant as such. But they were also, as applied to Anne, enlightening. Almost they supplied the key to the puzzle of her character. He had wondered what made her un-

nameable charm that was not Jocelyne's too describable charm. Here might be the explanation of it. Her charm was her aloofness from the desire to charm ; her superiority consisted in her unreadiness to triumph.

That he felt in some vague way. But he did not as yet realise how greatly it armed her for love. He did not know that in that warfare she who is unready, whose eyes are not scouts looking for the enemy, whose arms are most unpractised, whose thoughts plan no ambush, is more potent than the subtlest manœuvrers, than the best drilled and most vigilant of women.

The reason is that their schemes of conquest are plans to surrender, but she can be captured only by those who beg for quarter. Illingborough did not know this somewhat paradoxical truth, because he had himself no notion of what love might be, or thought he had not. He concluded that all his discovery amounted to was the discovery that he had made no discovery—at least so far as deciding between the sisters went. It was easy enough for a man like Captain Hatton, who fancied himself in love with Anne, to decide upon her superiority. But he himself was a lawyer—in the position practically of a judge. Anything in the nature of a personal prejudice must be crushed ; to allow his emotions to influence his judgment—which he took to be the

process of love—would be a scandal. He disliked the idea of Captain Hatton doing this : it made him indeed indignant—furious when he thought of it. But he was not going to imitate the captain. “ I shouldn’t feel justified in ‘ preferring ’ either Miss Wetherborne. Both I think are most—most pleasant,” he said.

“ Oh ! ” said Lady Start, who had been watching him with some interest. “ It seems to require a good deal of consideration to be really non-committal, doesn’t it ? What is about your age, Mr. Illingborough, if it isn’t a rude question ? About ninety ? ”

“ Twenty-eight,” said Illingborough.

Lady Start held up her hands.

“ In the interests of all impetuous people, I hope you won’t live to be a hundred,” she said. “ It’s nice to know you feel so perfectly judicious though.”

“ Why so ? ”

“ If you didn’t, I should regard so cautious and yet amiable a person as a dangerous rival to my nephew.”

Illingborough had never been so confused by any one before.

CHAPTER XV

TOM SPY

TOM had been lent to the rectory for the afternoon. He had on his Sunday clothes, including a motor-cap with flaps, which gave him a top-heavy but smart appearance. His duties were to lend a hand with the teacups and fetch balls at one end of the court, the rectory boot-boy, by name Samuel, being similarly employed at the other end.

Though allied for the afternoon, Tom was not disposed to make the understanding with the rectory boy, who was of a mean intelligence and greedy, a needlessly cordial one, especially as Samuel, knowing the ways of the kitchen, had secured for himself a better tea than his guest had managed to get. Therefore when Samuel—who had been placed, to begin with, at the worse-netted and sunnier end—proposed, after the tea interval, that they should exchange positions, Tom had not assented. It was true that he had the shadier side, but he had also contributed some mental toil in the way of

arranging the netting, so as to make his post a sinecure.

"Yew'll want to work off they maggeroons," he said. "I didn't get any."

"Fetch yew one ef yew'll change, Tom," said Samuel persuasively.

"Don't keer about 'em myself," said Tom loftily, though the struggle with his appetite was a keen one—"an' I'm quite comferable here."

"A bit o' choklit cake," urged Samuel. "Harf a pot o' jam?"

"No thank yew."

"What'll yew go for?" asked Samuel, crestfallen.

"Notten, me fat lad," said Tom, buttressed by his pride. "I never were a gurmant, nor fond o' tryen to look like a potato sack, and, as I've told yew, I'm comferable here. Jest now I'm goin' to have a smoke."

"That's not what yew're here for," said Samuel angrily. "An' if th' Missis catches yew at it, yew'll hear about it."

"Yew'll hear bout someet else, if yew doant get along an' fetch that ball," Tom assured him.

The voice of Odo crying "Samuel! Ball!" was indeed becoming painfully audible, and Samuel, who had crossed to Tom's side, where the garden became half wild, half shrubbery, on the pretext of hunting for

a ball that had fallen midway, felt that it would be wise to obey it.

"Comen', Mr. Odo," he said, scowling at Tom, who, in the safe umbrage, had drawn forth a penny packet of cigarettes, and was selecting one with all the care and air of a connoisseur. "Wait till yew're caught wi' it."

Tom, licked the cigarette well, and placed it between his lips.

"I'm agoin to wait," he said. "Agen this tree. Maybe I'll have a bit on a sleep when I done my smoke."

"Samuel! Ball! where are you?" came Odo's voice again.

"Hop along, Stouty!" said Tom.

The discomfited Samuel shook his fist and lumbered off, conscious that Tom, seated on the ground with his back to a thick-spread yew, was striking the match that would light the cigarette of peace, preparatory to enjoying a siesta, such as he himself hunting balls in the concentrated rays of the setting sun would have no chance of. He thought of slyly undoing on his way back some of the netting that so admirably guarded Tom's preserve from invading balls, but there was no time for it. Mr. Odo's voice had become too insistent.

Tom finished his cigarette, as he had vaunted that he would do, but he did not proceed to indulge in the

sleep with the prospect of which he had taunted Samuel. This was indeed from no sense of duty. Conscious that he had rendered his post a sinecure—only three balls had come over in the last two sets, and these were from the exceedingly high-bouncing service of Mr. Odo, who, with his partner, had now changed sides for a return match. Tom intended to avail himself of the leisure his intelligence had secured him. By passing through the shrubbery, he could unseen gain the back wall of the kitchen garden, against which many gooseberry trees grew. He had heard the rector remarking upon the advanced state of the gooseberries—"a particularly fine eating kind." They might not be quite ripe, but they would be worth trying. Farther along were strawberry beds. Tom had only been able to abstract quite a few from the many plates he had been carrying that afternoon. Yet the labourer is worthy of his hire.

Best of all, a white-heart cherry tree was crammed with its shining fruit. Tom knew the tree, having been to the rectory garden before. He had never tried it. He meant to try it now. It grew right in the middle of the kitchen garden ; among apple trees, with bushes of black and red currants at their feet. A path box-edged led up to a great mulberry with a seat under it, and there stopped. But one had only to dive in among the currants to reach the white-hearts.

The ground was so hard after weeks of hot weather, that hob-nails would not show. Even if they did, they would appear to be Samuel's. Samuel had spoken of the tree with watering mouth.

A venture so simple, yet promising such reward, was not likely to try Tom's easy and, towards himself, tender conscience. Introspection is out of place in a cherry thief ; and outward vigilance is its substitute.

It was outward vigilance on Tom's part that prevented him—as he stole up the mulberry tree path—having surmounted previous obstacles, such as the wall, with encouraging ease—from plumping right upon the two people who sat on the seat below the mulberry. The two people, as Tom saw out of the side of one eye, and in the moment of slipping behind cover, were Clifford and Jocelyne ; and the question was—need they interfere with his plans ? .

Tom decided that they needn't. Folks walking out are proverbially unnoticing, being taken up with kissing and cuddling—a contemptible business to watch, but one which has the merit of occupying the attention of its conductors to the exclusion of most other things. They would not, of course, care to be overlooked, if they happened to know, but they were not likely to happen to know, and if by any chance they spied him, their condition was still so much to the good in that, being confused at being caught

themselves, they were less likely than ordinary sensible people to want to catch their confuser.

For their feelings Tom didn't care. Miss Jocelyne he had a lively scorn for, and Mr. Clifford he disliked. Exactly why he disliked Clifford he could not probably have explained, though there were good reasons. One was that Mr. Clifford, whenever he saw Tom, called him "Bill." Clifford did so under the impression that he was being friendly, and would have been surprised to learn that it created a grievance. Yet it is a safe assumption that the friendliness which exacts no effort from the friendly person is rarely if ever appreciated. Perhaps it bears too close a resemblance to familiarity, which is, of course, friendliness with its tongue in its cheek.

Certainly Tom disliked Mr. Clifford just as much as he liked the other gentleman, Mr. Illingborough. Mr. Illingborough called him Tom, and also asked him questions about what the rocks were made of, and how he explained the action of the tide at various points—all as if Tom could give him information—which caused Tom to think that though possibly "queer," Mr. Illingborough was very pleasant.

It is possible that, if the parties under the mulberry tree had been different, Tom might have considered their feelings, and foregone his cherries. Reverence was not a conspicuous feature in his character ; and

small boys are not abashed by the same things as grown men. Yet Tom was not insensitive. He knew that people walking out preferred privacy, only he felt that the respect owed to their wishes depended on the genuineness of their attachment. Those two would go it anywhere.

The thought did strike him, as he stood there watching, that this was convenient. Supposing, for example, they had been Miss Anne and—and Mr. Illingborough, and his better feelings had had to prevail! They might have been. At least they might have been, if it had not been a part of Mr. Illingborough's queerness that he did not seem to understand that the rest were nowhere with Miss Anne. Certainly he had made no attempt to walk out with her. Tom was glad of it. He would have been exceedingly annoyed with any one who had dared to try such a thing. So would Miss Anne mostly. She was not the walking-out kind. Yet she liked Mr. Illingborough. That Tom knew from observation. She laughed at him out loud, and she laughed at hardly anybody; and she wasn't stiff with him, when she *was* with him. On the other hand, Tom had seen her go away when she saw she might have to go with him, instead of sidling up, as Miss Jocelyne would have done to anybody she fancied. That seemed queer in a way. But then

Miss Anne was queer too—in quite another sense from Mr. Illingborough's queerness. Still queerness was a sort of bond between them.

Tom had lost sight of Jocelyne and Clifford as soon as he began to work his way among the bush fruit. The ascent into the first fork of the cherry tree gave him an excellent view again, and it was from this point that he made the discovery that they were not kissing and cooing at all, but having a row. At least that was what it looked like. Miss Jocelyne was seated at one end of the bench ; Mr. Clifford at the other. That looked very like a row—not only to Tom, but to Clifford.

Jocelyne had just said with an air of finality—presuming finality to be the most unpleasant thing she could at present deal in—

“ I don't understand you. And nothing that you can say will make me.”

Clifford looked at her uneasily. He had done his utmost with smarming words and silky tongue to gloss over the undeniable fact that he had to some extent avoided her. Jocelyne had chosen to be intransigent. The truth is that she had looked forward to the rectory party as a triumph in which she should, so to speak, drag Clifford at her chariot-wheels for all to see. And he had scarcely been near her. She might, in the green Shantung, which she

was wearing for the first time, have begun other conquests, had there been any one there worth conquering. There wasn't. She had begun to dislike Illingborough so much—as the cause of her grievance—that she did not even want to impress him, and, except for Captain Hatton, there was nobody good enough to look at. Captain Hatton was after Anne. Anne in her old muslin! Jealousy had taken hold of Jocelyne, as she thought of it, and she had begun to sulk where she sat. Presently she had found that she was sitting by herself. In all probability that was the result of her ill-temper. Young ladies, wearing scowls, may be beautiful and beautifully dressed, but they are apt to be avoided.

Petruchios are rare at garden parties, and the Kates have to sit alone in consequence of the taboo they have set on themselves. So Jocelyne had sat until Clifford had inadvertently come near her. Then her request to be conducted round the garden was accompanied by looks that threatened a scene if he did not acquiesce. Hence the drama under the mulberry tree—with Tom in the gallery to watch. Clifford had come to the conclusion that there was no help for it but to make her privy to his secret.

“I'm going to tell you something,” he said, “that will make you understand me, and—what's more—

realise that I've been doing what I've done for your sake."

"Indeed!" said Jocelyne scornfully.

"Perhaps a little for my own too," he said, nodding; "since we're engaged."

"I expect so," said Jocelyne, replying first to the first part of his remark. "I'm not so sure that we are engaged though."

"Wait!" he said, with a smile that, without melting her, roused her curiosity.

It was not an easy story to tell. He had to admit her to his secret—an ill-gotten one—and at the same time persuade her that his attachment to her was unconnected with it—a genuine incident—and not a part of the ignoble programme he had sketched out for himself. But he had rehearsed the story pretty often, and he was not unsuccessful in telling it. He touched very lightly on the sordid parts, omitting the eavesdropping altogether. The impression he conveyed was that, being apprised of Mr. Mortlake's scheme, he had come down out of sheer curiosity to see how it would fare with Illingborough's management. Naturally he had fallen in love with Jocelyne as soon as he saw her—even before he realised that she was the one who deserved to be chosen. Of course, she was that one. What were Anne and Joan in comparison with her? Nobodies. Yet that

fool Illingborough, with his narrow-minded prejudice, was just as likely—more likely indeed—to name one of them before her. Fancy Anne an heiress ! It was ridiculous. She would not even want it. Whereas Jocelyne was cut out for the part. He dwelt with warmth—almost with moral indignation—upon the way that personal bias was bound to tell with a man like Illingborough.

Jocelyne listened with parted lips and eyes sparkling. She too—but it was unconscious in her case—was ready to gloze over the less pleasant features of the revelation. Her mind soared and fixed itself instantly on the salient point in it—the fortune that would reward success. It was the one thing she had dreamed of, hoped for. At last she touched it—a gorgeous reality ; that resolved itself in her thoughts into Paris frocks and lady's-maids and motors and yachts, and an ever-present figure of herself moving superb through the brilliant mazes of an incredibly smart set. All this was within her grasp, if only she could propitiate Illingborough.

“ Is it true ? Is it true ? ” she kept saying, as he added details.

“ Absolutely—I'll swear it if you like ? ”

She broke into delighted laughter like a child.

“ How lovely ! ” she said. “ Oh, I must have it. I must—I must.”

"You can, if you'll follow my advice," said Clifford, relieved by her readiness in accepting the golden point and ignoring all else. "But you must be guided by me."

She looked at him saucily.

"Oh, I see what's wanted now," she said. "Of course, if I'd known it would all have been so different—with Mr. Illingborough, I mean. It was very silly of you not to tell me. You nearly spoilt it. I don't know that I forgive you!"

"It was for your sake," Clifford reminded her, not quite so happy.

"Don't let's bother about 'sakes,'" said Jocelyne, rising. "We can think of those afterwards."

"But you love me?"

Jocelyne looked at him provokingly.

"I don't know," she said. "It depends, doesn't it, on a lot of things."

"Perhaps," said Clifford, "and a lot of things depend on it."

He too had risen, and Jocelyne took his arm.

"Silly!" she said. "Of course I like you."

They walked down the box-edged path in blissful ignorance that Tom was still perched like some black-bird in the cherry tree, having listened with a good deal of interest to their conversation. Tom's curiosity

had been stirred, though he had not fully understood. He decided to communicate the gist of it to Miss Anne, though she would disapprove of his listening. Meanwhile he filled his pockets with white-hearts.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME EMOTIONS, MRS. ODLER AND A SEED-CAKE

“DON'T you go to bother, Miss,” said Mrs. Odler.

“I may as well. There's plenty of time before I go to change,” said Anne. She seated herself at the kitchen table with a bowl and a wooden spoon, and began compounding a salad dressing for supper. She had just come in from playing tennis at Lady Start's—the same four that had pleased that lady at the rectory. It had been repeated several times lately, both at her garden party and on other afternoons when no one but Anne and Odo were invited up. Lady Start had openly explained that why she invited only them was because they were the only capable exponents of the game in the neighbourhood.

It was a plausible explanation, yet Mrs. Watterly could not help hoping that there was more in it than met the ear. For example, Anne might be invited up to gratify Captain Hatton. He was supposed to be attracted by her. That was amazing; yet it

might be true. If true—was it not much more possible—Mrs. Watterly asked herself—that Odo was asked because Miss Hatton was attracted by him? In Mrs. Watterly's opinion it was very much more possible. She recognised that it was not a necessary consequence. One could not argue that because Captain Hatton fancied Anne Wetherborne, therefore Captain Hatton's sister must have fallen a victim to Odo. Love is not so logical as that.

[On the other hand, Love is strangely swift and impetuous. It falls without warning and heavily, like thunder rain from a clear sky—upon some people. Miss Hatton did not superficially look the sort of young woman who would conceive a sudden tropical passion; but, once again, you never knew. Under a calm and even statuesque exterior the warmest fire may be smouldering. Odo had been asked up five times in a week. Nominally it was to make a four. Well, two pairs make a four, as mathematics teach us; is it not also true that one four makes two pairs? Odo was so good-looking, so nice, so clever, so everything; and he had gone in such absolutely spotless flannels every time with that purple and green sash, that was so wonderfully becoming to him, round his waist; that she would be a curious sort of girl—in Mrs. Watterly's opinion—that did not find him attractive. Of course, the boy himself was so

absolutely modest and generous that he did not quite realise what an opportunity lay before him. More enthusiasm on the subject of Miss Hatton would certainly have availed him better with her. More? Even some enthusiasm would have sufficed. Had he any at all? Veiled questions—calculated to make clear this point—had only elicited the fact that he considered her “weak on her back-hand.” The boy was so dreadfully wrapped up in the actual game that he could only think of his partner as related to it. That was a pity, and Mrs. Watterly would have liked to do more than hint (hints require so much self-restraint at critical moments) that whatever his feelings, he might try to show Miss Hatton that it was not only back-hands and reverse American services and lobbing that he was devoted to. Mrs. Watterly’s difficulty was not to hint so much that he would take alarm and his modesty develop into shyness. Undeniably shyness in love does not pay. Better an indifference which piques. Miss Hatton, thinking him bound up in “lobbing,” might be tempted to make advances—absolutely maidenly ones—like our late gracious Queen. Perhaps that would be best, particularly as she was, vulgarly speaking, a catch—at least for a curate. The worldly point of view has to be considered. A princess would not be too fine for such a boy as Odo. But let her make the advances

by all means : only a mother's anxiety in the meantime is bound to be great.

Odo, it must be confessed, had enjoyed his tennis without bothering about such things. So at first had Anne. She was fond of Lady Start ; she liked Captain Hatton and his sister. Also for the first time in her life she was glad of having something from outside to occupy her attention. The things that usually sufficed for her pleasure—solitary riding and fishing and boating—had not been altogether satisfactory the last few days. Solitude allowed her to think too much—new uneasy thoughts that sometimes only worried, at other times almost startled her. These thoughts, starting in all sorts of odd ways, had a habit of coming back ultimately to the notion that for some reason or other Mr. Illingborough did not think much of her and avoided her.

That hurt Anne, as well as puzzled her. What puzzled her was that she should *want* any one to think well of her in that way. Before, she had never troubled to think what people thought of her. It had seemed rather a waste of time. And yet now she kept doing it when the waste of time was so obvious, in that, however she might trouble, it was plain that Mr. Illingborough thought nothing of her. It must be so, because he avoided her. There was no getting over that. Once when she had suggested another fishing

at dawn, he had even made some pretext for refusing—frightfully long and polite and blundering—but a pretext. He must have wanted dreadfully to avoid going, to make a pretext. Pretexts were utterly unlike him.

Therefore Anne was glad at first to have Lady Start's invitations to tennis, since the strenuous games took her out of herself. What she could have wished was that there were no pauses between the games. She would have liked to play straight on without even a break for tea. In that event, another worry would not have had its chance of besetting her. The origin of this other worry was in Captain Hatton's attitude. He was very pleasant. Anne liked him. They had many subjects of conversation in common—hunting and sailing; and while those were being discussed, all was well. She did not mind that he could not talk of things in Mr. Illingborough's way—"the poetry way," she supposed it was—that made such shareable wonders of the sea and sky, and gave her strange thrills at unexpected moments. She knew that very few men did or could talk in that way. Mr. Illingborough was the only man she had known who could.

She did, on the other hand, mind what she vaguely set down as Captain Hatton's gallantry. He always began it so soon as they were by themselves, which

they were at intervals. Lady Start managed that also quite openly. She was the kind that liked to talk frankly of flirtations and young people enjoying themselves, and so on ; making it all seem amusing and friendly and commonplace. But why should Captain Hatton try to make such trifling seem of real importance ? He seemed absolutely sentimental at times, and made Anne quite uncomfortable. It wasn't surely possible that he had by some horrid chance fallen in love with her ? To Anne, falling in love conveyed nothing very definite. It was the sort of thing Jocelyne did very often, and it seemed to have the result of making her want to dress up and grimace and be restless and talk a good deal of nonsense. Mr. Clifford, Anne fancied, was rather the type of man who could do it, just as Jocelyne was the girl-type. It was more objectionable in a man even than in a girl, and suggested that he had some monkey in him.

There was nothing of the tricky beast about Captain Hatton, though he had seemed weak-minded at intervals. She was forced to the conclusion that nice men—as well as stupid ones—were perhaps capable of falling in love temporarily, and that the effect upon them of the passion was deplorably similar to that which it had on the disagreeable ones.

It distressed Anne to think she herself could in any way be a cause of stumbling in Captain Hatton, and

it might all be her fancy which was working stupidly. She would see him to-morrow at the otter hunt, and find perhaps that she had merely been stupid.

Now, as she broke the yolks of eggs into her bowl and mixed the oil and let the vinegar slide in drop by drop, she decided to worry no more about what might be all pure fancifulness—both in regard to Captain Hatton's sentimentality and Mr. Illingborough's reserve. There might even be a good reason for the latter. It could not be only fancifulness indeed, as Captain Hatton's attitude might be. It was real enough. But then Tom's story might account for it. It was a rambling story, and Anne, who was almost destitute of inquisitiveness—the feminine of curiosity—had not troubled to get it clear before she packed Tom off with a scolding for eavesdropping. Afterwards her dignity had forbidden her to cross-examine him. Still, it was clear that Mr. Illingborough was in some way the emissary of a rich relation who meant to leave one of them a fortune, and that Mr. Illingborough had to name that one. Anne had no doubt that he would choose justly, but it must in the meantime mean a great deal of worry for him. She was very little interested in the results, hardly picturing what a fortune might be to any one, and not in the least seeing herself (as Jocelyne did) an heiress.

How Mr. Clifford came into the business she could

not understand ; nor even whether Mr. Illingborough was aware that he knew of it. Just for a moment she had thought of telling Tom to repeat his story to Mr. Illingborough, but that seemed rather like poking—even like wishing to secure a favour for herself. The latter consideration decided Anne to have nothing to do with it, especially as Mr. Illingborough had so avoided her of late. She was so unscheming herself by nature that at first the notion of Jocelyne's taking advantage of her knowledge to push her way with Illingborough had not entered her mind.

It was Mrs. Odler, chatting while Anne stirred her salad dressing, that first gave her the notion that Jocelyne might be playing a part more earnestly than usual.

“ Whatever,” asked Mrs. Odler, apropos of nothing at all, “ have come over Miss Jocelyne the last few days ? ”

“ What do you mean ? ” asked Anne. “ Has anything come over her ? ”

“ That's for you to say, Miss.” Mrs. Oldler pursed her mouth, as though to say that if information was not required, it was not by that organ that it would flow.

As Anne, however, remained incurious, and there was no other means of conveying the effect she wished, Mrs. Odler retracted and became a torrent. “ Down

to breakfast at 8.45 every morning regular. Out in the boat before lunch with Mr. Illingborough—walks in the afternoon. Splashes and dashes into the kitchen! Why, tisen't like Miss Jocelyne—not as I've knowed her. Why, she baked a cake yesterday, Miss Jocelyne did, while you was away."

"A good one?" asked Anne.

"There was a good one for tea," said Mrs. Odler darkly. "And the gentleman he thought she'd made it. P'raps she thought it too. I couldn't say about that."

"There was some mistake about it?"

"I can't say about mistakes." At the beginning of a conversation Mrs. Odler was always terribly exact. She seemed to feel that it gave her the right to a larger latitude in speaking later on.

"You think there was?" said Anne patiently.

"I know her'n went stone heavy. What else 'ud you expect bakin' for the first time an' not botherin' to weigh your 'terials, nor do nothen proper, unless it be to wear a smart apron? Stone heavy it went, an' the pig had et. I made another—but I ain't sure, Miss Anne, that there was sense in my doing of et."

Anne asked why, though she was still not greatly interested.

"Because men is simple creatures," Mrs. Odler said. "I don't say nothen of the master. 'Made by my

own daughter's pretty hand?' says he, blind as a bat. Not that he was ever one to notice anything, or before now he'd have larned how little pretty hands has to do with decent vittles. That's what he says. 'Made by my own daughter's pretty hand?' 'Your own daughter's very floury hand,' says Miss Jos, a-smilin' and a-wilin'. There! And hers—what the pig had—a curren cake, and mine a seed——"

"She probably didn't notice the difference," said Anne. She often had to squash Mrs. Odler when on the subject of Jocelyne.

"Nor didn't want to," said Mrs. Odler contumaciously. 'You don't say so?' says Mr. Illingborough. 'I've never tasted a better,' says he. 'Wunnerful!' he says. Miss Jos smiles like the angels—only more innocent to look at. 'It's jest a little heavy,' says she. A little heavy!—when flakes couldn't never be lighter." Indignation took possession of Mrs. Odler's windpipe.

"That shows she thought it was hers," said Anne extenuatingly, and deeming it to be a matter of injured feelings on Mrs. Odler's part. "Clearly! Because she knows yours are always light."

"What Miss Jos knows I ain't able to answer for," said Mrs. Odler. "But she knows one thing more'n you know, Miss Anne; and that is the thing I was

telling you on—the innercense of men, and in particular of gentlemen. He swallowed it whole, Mr. Illingborough did. ‘Here,’ says he to himself, ‘is a young lady as can cook; an’ cook well. In ten minutes, and in a apron smart enough for a droring-room she can turn out a cake as I haven’t tasted the better of.’ What then, you says, perhaps, Miss Anne?” proceeded Mrs. Odler, it being pretty certain that Anne was not going to say anything. “What next; says you? Well, I can tell you that too. ‘There ain’t many young ladies like that,’ he’d say to himself. ‘Very few, from all I can hear—I’m a bacheldore—and a bacheldore’s is a comferable position for a young man. But there’s something better—if folks is to be believed—and that’s the married state, if you don’t go and make mistakes.’ Mark my words, Miss Anne;” said Mrs. Odler, returning to her own most characteristic voice, after acting most dramatically the supposed communion of Illingborough with himself, “that young man will make a mistake, and that cake o’ mine will be the rightful cause. I wish I hadn’t baked it, I do.”

“Well, don’t burn the pie in consequence,” said Anne flippantly. “There, the dressing’s done. I think you’ve been talking nonsense, Mrs. Odler.”

She went out of the kitchen quickly, leaving Mrs. Odler snubbed but not crushed. She would have felt even less snubbed than she did if she had known the effect of her conversation on Anne's mind.

CHAPTER XVII

JOAN FINDS WORK FOR HER HAND

THE defection of Odo, for that is what his goings to Storr Court amounted to, had the effect upon Joan of producing an outburst of beneficence unparalleled in the annals of Mazinghope. Not a cottage was left unvisited, not an old woman, though six times Joan's age, but was offered most salutary and uncompromising advice.

The weather might be warm, the more superficial courtesies of the good Samaritan might be difficult to observe when one was suffering oneself from a heat rash. These considerations did not deter Joan. She felt that if those who should be the workers chose to waste their time and their opportunities in worldly games and dallyings, it was the more incumbent upon one who had a sense of duty to do what she could.

People who have a sense of duty are the drivers of the vast engine of humanity : they sometimes err by forgetting to apply the brakes when the points are up. Joan did not stop until Mazinghope by passive and

in some cases almost active resistance forced her to. In less than a week two old women became stone deaf, and could not hear a word that Joan said, though she shouted herself hoarse. Mrs. Gideon put a lock on her door, and Christabel Muggs cheeked Joan to her face. When Joan, rendered desperate, tried to catch the child in order to shake her, the little brute ran blubbering into her mother's cottage, and Mrs. Muggs came out and was very abusive and said she would be much obliged to Miss Joan if she would leave her child alone.

"They as is practically chil'n theyselves," said Mrs. Muggs, with needless rancour, "haven't got no call to come poking into the ways of growd wimmen which have work to do."

"Very well, Mrs. Muggs," said Joan, with what dignity she could. "You are very ungrateful. I shall not bring you any more chicken broth."

"Thank you, miss, I'm sure," said Mrs. Muggs, misunderstanding the nature of this food, in a very loud voice—"but I don't keep chickens, and ef I did I'd giv 'em somethen more nurturing than that there soup."

There was a gargle of laughter from the rear of the cottage adjoining, where lived Mrs. Toop, a person whom Joan only the day before had massaged for rheumatism. Joan walked off with a very red face

and heaving chest. Wounded pride was not relieved till she had left the village behind her, and indulged in a brief burst of tears.

It was little wonder if, after this experience, Joan washed her hands of charity in Mazinghope, at any rate for the time being, and looked about for fresh victims to assist. They were not easy to find. Mrs. Odler had made it clear, long since, that any help rendered by Miss Joan in the kitchen would have to be of a subordinate nature, and that she would brook no advice or instruction. Under such conditions Joan could not feel that she was being "helpful" in the strenuous manner that alone satisfies any one in whom the spirit of the reformer burns. Nor was the garden a much more inviting field of labour. Tom needed reform as much as any savage, it is true. On the other hand, he was far more elusive than a savage. He had not even the inquisitiveness that draws the ingenuous cannibal from his lair to see what the white visitor is made of. Tom fled into his cave—so to speak—at the first approach of the missionary Joan, and stayed there till she went away.

Joan would have been willing to try her luck with Mr. Illingborough, if she could have got hold of him. She felt that he at any rate was not a mocker or frivolous. Serious things appealed to him, though perhaps not the best serious things. Unfortunately

Jocelyne had quite suddenly appropriated him. Joan was convinced that Mr. Illingborough did not relish being appropriated, but she dared not dispute with Jocelyne over her captive. Joan could take a snub with anybody, but Jos could be so particularly unpleasant.

There really seemed to be nobody left to look after but her father—in the buzz of whose immovable complaisance even a zealot would begin to feel drowsy—and Joan was beginning to think she must leave home and become a hospital nurse—a vocation that had always appealed to her owing to the physical helplessness, as a rule, of the patients—when a chance meeting set her thoughts in other grooves.

She had set out for Porton Langley to look at a paper called *Nursing Notes*. She knew it was taken in at the circulating library there, and she thought it might assist her in acquiring a knowledge of the preliminaries of her future profession.

If not, she could at least while reading it have the feeling of being almost a professional, while the *Lancet* would probably afford gruesome titbits that would be in harmony with her sombre frame of mind. She went by the cliff, and coming down the path into the town she saw Clifford a little way ahead. He saw her too, and stopped and came towards her at once and entered into conversation.

“ It’s most awfully pleasant to see you, Miss Joan,” he said. “ I haven’t seen any of you for such a long time.”

His tone was warm and almost, you might say, emotional ; nor could Joan be expected to guess that the yearning note in it was due to the fact that he felt a little nervous lest, hurrying on, she should observe Miss Maine from the hotel, and guess what was indeed the truth, that he had only just parted company with that young lady. There was no harm whatever in his going for a walk with Miss Maine, of course, but at the same time he did not wish Jocelyne to be informed of it, for the reason that Jocelyne (though they did not meet now) was sending him daily notes, expressive of her continued affection for him, and of the progress she was making with Illingborough, and she would not understand that a man must also talk to somebody, if only to solace his exile.

Joan, of course, could not be expected to guess all this, and as a matter of fact his tone and manner very favourably impressed her. Before, when Jocelyne and he were always together, she had disapproved very highly of him and (but this was in no way the cause of her disapproval) he had taken almost no notice of her. Jocelyne’s appropriation of Mr. Illingborough, suggesting to Joan the natural

idea that she had thrown Mr. Clifford over—or meant to shortly, if she had not already done so—gave to the latter a colouring of pathos that had not hitherto been noticeable. He was—he must be—in trouble. She could tell that from his voice, even if she had not known the predisposing causes. The temptation to be a ministering angel, ever strong in Joan, overwhelmed her; and she even forgot the *Nursing Notes*.

“How do you do, Mr. Clifford?” she said briskly. “Yes, it is a very long time since we’ve seen you. Haven’t you been well—or what is it?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Clifford pleasantly, astonished by her friendliness and awkwardly placed by her questions. “One can’t always do what one wants, you know.”

Joan nodded. He required sympathy, it was clear.

“The great thing is to be able to feel that it is other people’s faults and not our own,” she said. That was the great thing with Joan. She sailed over a lot of troubles wafted by that feeling, and she believed that it must help any one. “Next to that, I suppose,” she continued, “it is important to hope on, hope ever.”

Clifford stole a glance at her face. What was the perfect little prig up to? She was apparently quite serious, so he responded—

“I expect you’re right. I hadn’t thought of it. Another stunning day, isn’t it?”

He had turned with her, and they were walking together towards the little town. For a moment Joan did not reply. His reference to the weather bothered her. She had grown suspicious of references to the weather when she was trying to comfort or admonish people. It was an annoying way people had of trying to evade the sympathy which they really required without perhaps being aware of it. Joan had to quell her kindness often owing to some such commonplace remark. But she was too much in need at present of allowing her charitable impulses free play to be put off by it.

"It is a beautiful day," she said softly. "I am glad you can appreciate it. Of course Jocelyne is very well."

"Is she?" said Clifford, more puzzled than before.

Joan looked up at him earnestly—

"Mr. Clifford," she said, "if I can help you, you must tell me. Perhaps you think I haven't noticed, but I have——"

Clifford was startled.

"Noticed what?" he said sharply. Was it possible, he asked himself, that she had got possession of his secret in some way? It was an unpleasant notion. "Please explain," he said.

"Need I?" said Joan, revelling in the thought that she need. "Oh, Mr. Clifford, it is all so sadly

obvious. But I fear Jos is like that. She has never been of what you can call a loyal disposition. We all have a weak spot in our characters, and I am afraid that disloyalty is Jocelyne's. You must not think too hardly of it."

She paused. Clifford had brightened—his face was quite changed already. She continued—

"Only time will show what dear Jos really thinks and feels. You see, Mr. Illingborough is somebody new. He may not stay very long. Even if he does, Jos may get tired of him; or he may find out that he has made a mistake. I think," went on Joan succulently, "the man who will win her—and whom she will need—will be one who is patient and constant and willing to put up with—with——"

"Her ups and downs?" suggested Clifford, who was beginning to relish the conversation. What a superb little prig she was after all! She might in her bumptious innocence even be useful.

"Yes," said Joan, "her changes of mind, poor Jos!" The opportunity of thus taking Jocelyne, all unwitting, under her moral patronage, was intoxicating delight to her. It made her more fluent and earnest than ever. "I do not know if you are that kind of man, Mr. Clifford?" She turned her solemn eyes on him.

"I hope so," said Clifford modestly. "I shouldn't like to say so, of course——"

"No," said Joan. "But if you are, I should like to help you, if I can."

Clifford protested his gratitude, and Joan realised that she had previously been mistaken in him. He was not the odious philanderer she—and Mrs. Watterly—had thought. He was an honest and steadfast lover, who had had the misfortune to fix his affections upon a flirt. That fickle creature was her sister. Joan's indignation against Jocelyne rose high, as she thought of this. She decided that it was her duty to speak to her before it was too late. The sooner a straightforward talk took place the better. It might be useless, a waste of trouble—but Joan was no economist of moral effort. And even if Jocelyne hardened her heart, Mr. Illingborough would get more than an inkling of whither she was leading him.

She arrived back somewhat late for supper, but with every prospect of relishing the meal.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE EVE OF THE CHASE. JOAN REPULSED

NEVER had her father's conversation seemed so futile to Anne as in the course of that meal for which she had—a little time before to the tune of Mrs. Odler's gossip—prepared the salad-dressing. Otter-hunting was Mr. Wetherborne's theme, and no quarry was ever done to death more thoroughly.

The subject had been started by reason of the fact that there was to be a hunt the next morning, the meet being arranged at no great distance from Storr Court. Anne, as has been related, was going. She had the love of hunting ingrained in her, and if she ever considered the matter from the humanitarian point of view, she was not inclined to do so to-night. She craved excitement. A tiger-hunt on foot would have suited her most completely.

Jocelyne and Illingborough were also going, but they had qualms about it. Illingborough's were real qualms, and Jocelyne's affected. She disliked getting wet, and muddy, and having to rush about

breathless, but for this occasion and for reasons not eminently connected with it she also was for hunting. She had, in fact, persuaded Illingborough to go, though he was not aware of it and she pretended reluctance. He felt reluctance, but candidly confessed to curiosity. He had never seen an otter-hunt and would like to, though he felt that he ought not to lend his countenance to what must surely be a heartless sport.

Mr. Wetherborne, who liked to be modern and civilised, developed the view that it was a brutal sport. People, he said, ought to be ashamed to follow it. He would not do it himself for anything you could offer him. What had the poor otter done that it should be hunted by a pack of men, women, and hounds, whom it had never seen before, and would never have the chance of seeing again? The poor otter had done nothing—nothing at all. Of course the brute was very destructive to fish, and ought to be destroyed. Personally, he would like to have it shot at sight, or trapped. It was mere vermin, and the way it ripped up a fine fish and left it to waste was disgusting to think of. It deserved no mercy. If we must be merciful, let us be merciful to the fish which gives good sport. Otter-hunting was wretched sport at the best. Wading about in mud and water after a lot of noisy hounds could not be called sport. It was scarcely gentlemanly, and certainly not ladylike. It

was also very apt to sow the germs of rheumatic fever. For example, Mr. Wetherborne attributed the twinges he occasionally felt in his left wrist to the soakings he got when after otters in his youth. By Jove, he had had some capital days, though. It was something like hunting then. The rivers were deeper, the otters were more plentiful, the hunting people were keener. Now they put on a uniform and thought they knew all about it. Mr. Wetherborne doubted if they did. He thought he could give them a good many hints if they came to him. Then followed a series of otter-hunting anecdotes, all remarkable for the fact that only by reason of Mr. Wetherborne's acuteness and indefatigability had they been brought to a successful issue.

Anne snapped at him once or twice. She had a headache, or something like it. Ordinarily she bore her father's conversation in the most equable manner, having come to the conclusion, as many women must, though without defining it, that it is good exercise for elderly gentlemen to talk, and keeps them in health, and that there is no more reason to expect epigrams from them, or even good sense, than from bees droning.

To-night it all got on her nerves, and she showed it. Thereafter she was annoyed at what she took to be Illingborough's disapproval of her ill-temper. With him, instinctive respect for age and experience

quelled the rebelliousness which he felt now and again as a result of the shocks brought to bear by Mr. Wetherborne upon his logical faculties—that she felt vaguely. What right had he to criticise her—even silently? She was nothing to him. And in any case he too was blind as a bat, as her father was. Well, let him be. Let him think Jocelyne perfection, if he chose. He seemed to have decided to.

If Anne could have known it, Illingborough's grave appearance was due far more to inward doubts of himself, than to any certainties he had of whom to approve or disapprove. The past few days had only impaled him further on the horns of his dilemma. His avoidance of Anne had been instinctive rather than deliberate. Ever since the rectory party he had feared that he might become as biassed towards her as Captain Hatton was, not that he suspected himself of being in love with her. For one thing, Captain Hatton had, so to speak, pegged out his claim. For another, Illingborough himself would not have dreamed of such a thing. Duty forbade it. With none of the Wetherbornes could he possibly fall in love. Lastly, he had never felt the emotion—at least not recognisably. It could not, he fancied, and also resolved, be the sort of feeling he had towards Anne—of a kind of unbalanced admiration at odd moments for some one whom in cold blood—or at any rate in

cold theory—he could not and would not particularly esteem. That sort of feeling was merely a weak-minded deference to her unnameable charm. He wished it were not unnameable, for if he could have named it he would have been so much more certain that his intellect was not clouding. She made his brain misty. Yet he had to do her justice as well as Jocelyne.

Jocelyne was so different. He was quite clear as to her, or thought he was. Mrs. Odler thought otherwise, it will be remembered; and certainly in the matter of the cake Illingborough had been deceived. So, perhaps, in his willingness to think the most of people (which became, in the case of Anne, a most strange unwillingness), he was to some extent deceived by Jocelyne in other matters,—only to some extent, however.

He gave her the utmost credit for the virtues she endeavoured to show herself possessed of—amiability, the desire to improve her mind, housewifely ability, courtesy—but he could now see behind them all the mainspring of their action—which was the wish to please. That also was creditable, if—as he naturally supposed—there was no plot behind. Still, though the desire to please may produce virtues, in itself as Illingborough recognised, it is not a virtue. There was Jocelyne's weakness.

It was a weakness which, for the last day or two,

had, however, made Illingborough uneasy, and he had been thinking of it a good deal before supper. Modesty absolutely forbade him to suppose that Jocelyne could have become attracted by him. Illingborough reviewed his own limitations, and confirmed the absolute impossibility of such a thing. A further review of his acts and speeches since he had been at the Sea House only strengthened this opinion. At the same time he had to confess that if he were a conceited puppy, he might have supposed that the painful accident of her fancying—most mistakenly, of course—that she liked him in that particular way had occurred. He almost cut himself (he was shaving at the time) under the shock of this admission, and blushed at his own reflection in the glass. If it was so, he must leave at once. It would be the only right thing to do, the only chivalrous thing.

He could not then fulfil his commission, but that was a small consideration comparatively. He had always doubted his ability to fulfil it. In any case this new development—if it was a development—and not the phantasy of a brain in improper working order—made the task impossible. How could he pretend to give an impartial judgement under such circumstances?

He went down to supper uncertain whether he should write first to Mr. Waterlane and ask him to explain to Mr. Mortlake that he must resign his post,

before he actually left, or whether he should go off by some train to-morrow and explain the necessity on his arrival. To a young man in such a quandary Mr. Wetherborne's valuable disquisition on the humanity of otter-hunting was naturally of a secondary interest; and though he listened with his ears, and said "Yes" and "No" at intervals, he would have found it difficult to give the smallest *précis* of Mr. Wetherborne's argument.

Joan's arrival in the middle of the meal—which Mr. Wetherborne's delicate manner of cutting up and eating lettuce, in the breathing spaces of his conversation, threatened to render interminable—created a diversion, for Joan not only had something to say, like Mr. Wetherborne, but, unlike him, was quite clear as to what that something was. She took advantage of a dramatic pause on Mr. Wetherborne's part, following on the account of the mysterious escape—actually between Mr. Wetherborne's legs—of the largest dog-otter that he had ever seen—that (in all probability) any one had ever seen, to plunge in.

"I've been over to Porton Langley," she said importantly.

"Had they a triumphal arch ready?" inquired Anne, not without spitefulness. She had a vague desire to make Illingborough annoyed with her.

"I don't know what you mean, Anne," said Joan, in her matter-of-fact way. "I didn't see any arch, and I don't see why there should have been one. I met Mr. Clifford, poor man."

She fixed her eyes on Jocelyne, who gave her a sweet smile. "Why 'poor man'?" she inquired carelessly. "You didn't massage him, did you?"

The story of Mrs. Toop's screams under Joan's handling had got about, much to Joan's annoyance, as Jocelyne knew. Joan went very red.

"No, I didn't," she said, furious to hear Anne sniggering and to see a faint smile even upon Illingborough's face. "I sympathised with him."

"Really!" said Jocelyne. She had a sort of presentiment that Joan was on the moral war-path, and she was not anxious to have Clifford brought up at that juncture of affairs.

"You gave him a sort of spiritual massage, Joan!" said Mr. Wetherborne—who sometimes perceived the drift of a joke when it was not particularly opportune. "I trust he did not scream?"

"I sympathised with him," said Joan, scorning her father's interruption, "because I think he needed it."

"A capital reason—capital!" said Mr. Wetherborne. "We all need it—we do not all get it." He sighed and helped himself to a small heart of lettuce.

"Why I think he needed it," pursued Joan, looking at Illingborough this time, "is because I believe he is in love."

"Oh yes," said Illingborough. His mind had gone off to the question of what day he should leave—whether to-morrow or not. Jocelyne, congratulating herself on his evident absent-mindedness, saw a way of nipping Joan's intentions.

"I think you're right, Kid," she said. "It's that Miss Hatton, I suppose. Everybody seems to be. Odo is in a positively ridiculous state about her. Poor Odo!" She laughed, but Joan went redder than ever. Jocelyne had indeed with great skill hit the weak point in her armour. Joan had a vision of Odo at the feet of that hateful, stiff, worldly London woman, and the vision was followed by a choking feeling.

"How—how dare you say such a thing?" she said. "He isn't. Odo isn't." She glared about her fiercely.

"Why not, why not?" said Mr. Wetherborne, cheerfully unaware that tender chords had been touched. "Young men will be young men, and Odo is a good-looking lad. Hallo! Anything the matter?"

Joan had suddenly got up from her chair, marched out of the room, and banged the door behind her.

"I'll go and see," said Jocelyne tactfully, and she

followed Joan out as far as the passage. She knew better than to go farther, and returned to the room a minute or two later to explain that Joan was all right.

"A passing touch of indigestion, I daresay," said Mr. Wetherborne. "It was in her mother's family."

"I expect she got a little hot walking to Porton Langley this afternoon," said Jocelyne, congratulating herself on the successful result of her skilful intervention. Illingborough, she knew, had not noticed it, and had only observed the sisterly way in which she had gone to see after Joan, while Anne sat still and scornful in her chair. It was rather an effective contrast between them. What was Anne thinking about it all? Jocelyne did not know, but she knew enough of Anne to know that she would not meddle after Joan's fashion. Her indifference was the best of Anne.

Altogether Jocelyne felt in great spirits. She felt that things were going well with her, and that she was born to scheme skilfully. She and Anne left Illingborough with Mr. Wetherborne to hear more of the remarkable dog-otter that had now become a tradition with all a tradition's possibilities, and retired to bed. They were to be up early to drive with the mail-cart to Dants—the farm near Storr Court where the hunt was to meet.

CHAPTER XIX

AN OTTER IS HUNTED

ILLINGBOROUGH had understood that Jocelyne and Anne and he were to start together for the meet, and he had looked forward to that arrangement. As a square is the safest formation for repelling the onset of a savage foe, so is a triangle the best security against the attacks of a too insidious friendliness.

He had decided—in his sleep partly and partly as he dressed—to write to Mr. Waterlane, stating his determination to withdraw from the Sea House. That would be more businesslike than leaving at a moment's notice, and would appear less strange to his hostesses. They could hardly be expected to understand an absolutely sudden departure, and it would involve discourtesy. Illingborough shrank from discourtesy as much as from anything. Moreover, the humility which comes with early rising, that feeling of the unimportance of oneself which laps a man in the grey dawn, had reacted upon him to such an extent that he had almost persuaded himself that

his uneasiness was unfounded. What—he asked himself—could possibly be the attraction to a lovely and charming young woman of such a shivering worm as he felt himself to be ?

He came down to a dewy sunrise—reminding him of that first morning at the Sea House when Tom had pointed out to him the pool where Anne was bathing—to find Anne at the breakfast-table, hastily gobbling the last of that meal. She was in a green woollen jersey, short skirt, and thick boots, and a long tipped pole leaned against the chair beside her. She looked most enviably fresh and awake.

“ I hope I’m not late,” said Illingborough, after they had exchanged “ Good-morning.”

“ No. Jos isn’t down yet. The cart won’t be at the cross-roads for another half-hour.” Anne got up as she spoke and grasped her pole. “ Begin, if you like. There’s the egg-boiler. I’m going on.”

“ Going on ? ” echoed Illingborough, dismayed.

“ Yes. I hate driving at this hour. Schrams you. See you later, I daresay——”

She nodded, and walked to the door. Illingborough, sleepy and miserable, made an effort to detain her.

“ Won’t you get tired ? Or mayn’t I go with you ? I’d love the walk.”

“ You haven’t had breakfast yet,” she said. “ And

I can't wait. Besides, Jos is expecting you to go with her——”

“ But she wouldn't mind. I don't want breakfast.” His protest was eager, even beseeching.

Anne looked at him curiously. She seemed to hesitate a moment.

“ Yes, you do,” she said finally, in her curtest way, and walked out. The feeling that she had gone out into the day while he was left behind in the darkness and staleness of the night oppressed Illingborough, striking him as it did not only in a literal but also in an imaginative way, and he began boiling eggs in as half-hearted a manner as a man can begin that task. The most ardent disciple of Wordsworth may sometimes feel that Dawn can depress as well as uplift. Still, the secret of its power is that it cheers as it proceeds, and even by the time the eggs were boiled, Illingborough had become at any rate more resigned.

Jocelyne, entering a moment later, contributed somewhat unexpectedly to his enlivenment. He had rather thought she would be as dull as himself, and inclined to languor and querulousness. She entered, on the contrary, in the sunniest of moods, and the news of Anne's departure made her still more lively. Her mock imperiousness became her.

“ You'll have to do everything, then,” she said,

seating herself in a chair. "You've boiled some eggs, have you? Well, now you must make the tea. You look very cold and wretched. You'll have to run behind the cart, if you don't look warmer after breakfast. Is this your passion for otter-hunting?"

"I'm afraid I can't call it a passion," said Illingborough, rather glad to be made to work.

"All the better," said Jocelyne. "I shan't scruple to make you look after me. I always get left behind, but I shan't mind so much if you'll keep with me."

He wished then that he had not been in such haste to disavow his hunting instincts, and characteristically made himself take sides against his own inclination.

"If I can be of any use," he said, "I shan't feel such a helpless donkey as I know I shall look."

Jocelyne beamed upon him.

"You say that kind of thing just as if you meant it; but just think if I would let you escort me if it were true!" she said archly. "You'll be endlessly useful, for I'm a dreadful walker, and these boots one has to wear only make me worse."

The boots in question were a high-laced kind with lower heels than Jocelyne fancied. Whether it was compulsory to have them both so new and so tight was a matter Illingborough felt doubtful about, but not competent to pass an opinion on. For the kind of hunting she meant to do they were perhaps ade-

quate, though even the walk to the cross-roads, where they were to pick up the mail-cart, was rendered slow by them, and the new laces came undone and had to be retied twice.

Apart from the somewhat excessive gratitude she showed for Illingborough's assistance on these occasions, Jocelyne seemed to have forgotten her sentimentality of the past few days, and was even a little absent-minded. Illingborough did not regret it. To watch the twilight fading on every side into day, the drenched grass twinkling from gossamer to pearl, the hedge flowers lifting drooped heads and opening shut eyes, to hear the herald birds and the whole landscape beginning to buzz and quiver at the coming of the sun, was pleasure enough without conversation.

The mail-cart, an antiquated vehicle with a box for His Majesty's mail behind, and a plank bench behind the driver's seat for passengers, would not have broken the spell, in spite of an off-wheel having "gone squeaky," as the driver said, and vastly out-tweeting the birds in consequence, had it not been that the driver himself, Josiah Topp by name, was a garrulous old man with a sly insinuating manner that Illingborough mistrusted.

"I han't seed yew go otter-hunten, Miss Jos'lin, not these last tew years," he said, as soon as he had established them safely on the plank behind him.

"I did go t'reckin 'twaddn't in yew're line anny more."

"Well, you were wrong, Josiah, you see," said Jocelyne.

The old man turned and winked at Illingborough. "Maybe 'tiddn't on'y the otter as draws missie now," he said.

"Oh yes, it is, Josiah," said Jocelyne quickly, after a quick glance at Illingborough's face. "We hope to have a splendid day."

"So yew should, so yew should," chuckled the old man. "For yew've started et t'right way. Et minds me o' the old song 'Hares on the mountains.' Yew know et, sir?"

"No," said Illingborough.

Mr. Topp began to quaver the first verse of that true ditty—

"If all yew young men were as hares on the mountain,
Then all yew young maidens would get guns, go a-
hunting."

"Take care the horses aren't startled," said Jocelyne, hoping to quell him by irony. But Mr. Topp was no diplomatist, capable of detecting the very whispers of breezes. He knew human nature and how it liked to be rallied.

"Doan't yew be afeard. 'Tiddn't the first time they've heerd music. Why, they dew know wedding

marches by heart. Mr. Hidgecock, when he had 'em, he used 'em for bridals—he did. Times it was bridals, times it was burials—an' always steady, whichever 'twere."

"And now they carry the mails?" said Illingborough, glad to seize any opportunity that promised to lead Mr. Topp to other subjects.

"Parcelcesses and passengers," said Mr. Topp. "Look at 'em a-steppin' out. Seem to know like as it might be a happy couple they're a-carryin'."

There was no stopping him, and they had no relief till Mr. Topp set them down two minutes' walk from the meeting-place. They had only to cross a field to look down on it, a place where the river widened out to a shallow pebbly ford, with here and there a big clean boulder, that leaned scornfully against the thin swirl of water. Farther along, the banks rose and closed to cliffs, and the river deepened and went with a rush, and there was only a scramble way by rocks and fallen stones, shadowed by tree-hung steepnesses.

The scene at the ford was picturesque, as are most hunting scenes. There were several men in the hunt garb proscribed by Mr. Wetherborne, carrying their lengthy implements notched with the tale of perished otters. Captain Hatton was among them, looking broad and big, and in his element. He was talking to Anne—one of several ladies who were evidently in-

tending to follow. She had her hands clasped round her pole and listened eagerly. There were boys and hobbledehoys, and a terrier or two brought by their private owners to see otter life, and terriers belonging to the hunt, and the hounds themselves, woolly-maned creatures, slow and clumsy, but river-lovers, eager to begin and find their enemy, and give tongue to their deep music as of horns blown and echoing in water-caves.

Jocelyne and Illingborough must have been some time on the road in spite of the way the horses had "stepped," for, even as they came up, a signal was given and the hounds went lumbering down stream.

"They're starting," said Jocelyne. "Don't you think it would be best if we cut across to Nagley Wynd? They're bound to come that way, and it's awful having to struggle along that bit of undercliff where they are now." She had just caught a glimpse of Clifford among the hunt followers, and thought it as well they should not meet, at least, just yet. She wanted Mr. Illingborough's attention concentrated upon herself.

"Certainly," he said. "You know best. Your sister appears to be wading already."

"Oh, Anne goes everywhere," said Jocelyne scornfully. "She wouldn't miss a foot of it. We shan't see much of her."

CHAPTER XX

ILLINGBOROUGH IS CAUGHT

No sport is pursued through a lovelier diversity of scenes than otter-hunting in a country of hills and deep valleys and many streams. The river that runs in such a country, now fast and now slow, hustling over falls to drowse suddenly in deep pools, creeping from these to opener spaces where the hurry and clatter begins again, or between equal banks of greenest meadowland mimicking the sober roll of the Thames—is in itself a model of changefulness. Dodge from one such to another, and so on to a third, and through again, testing their backwaters and marshy outlets, and letting a short steep climb or breakneck downhill scramble alone intervene between water and water, and then while the one element prevails, the changes that are rung upon it are infinite.

The hounds and the hunters pursued such a course, and sometimes near by and sometimes far off Jocelyne and Illingborough heard the hounds give tongue, or saw them dipping and swimming. The particulars of

the hound-work were lost upon Illingborough, though now and again from some point of vantage Jocelyne would vaguely remark that such and such a hound was "feathering," or that another one roaring in the shallows proclaimed a find. She talked at random of "flashing," and "recovering," and swimming the foil, and professed to distinguish between the sharp bell notes of the foxhound and the deeper bugling of the shaggy otter-hounds. She explained that some hounds would swim all the time, while others would not wet their feet but kept on the dry land, while the pack were swimming their otter. "Skirters" they were called, Jocelyne said; and the name dwelt in Illingborough's mind, since it also in a way distinguished Jocelyne from Anne. Only there was this additional difference in Jocelyne's case, that she not only did not care to wet her feet, but seemed unanxious even to keep up with the Field.

It was due to this perhaps that when, after some steady walking and false alarms and markings, an otter was put down, and hunted for hours, Illingborough and Jocelyne generally seemed to be in the wrong place. They came up just after stickles had been formed, and when the people who had been standing knee to knee across the river to keep the poor quarry from getting through (as the dog-otter had gone between Mr. Wetherborne's legs) were

dispersing to re-form higher up or lower down. Jocelyne justified her various movements by saying that they should be very careful not to forge ahead and perhaps spoil sport, though the members of the Field did not seem to be so particular. Illingborough had the satisfaction of hearing in the distance such cries as "Hold hard," "Stand still," and so on, and a good deal of exhilarating—and no doubt sound—advice to mostly invisible hounds, but he could not feel that he had taken much part in the pursuit. The first kill occurred not so very far from them, though they did not see it.

"That's the rattle," said Jocelyne, and Illingborough was not sorry that he had missed the "Worry." Only he would have liked to come up with the others and with Anne, and not always be taking short cuts to where the Field didn't somehow seem to be, or long circuitous walks to avoid deep water. The country was very beautiful, but the incessant walking to nowhere in particular, the perpetual loitering followed by hurrying to catch up people with whom they could not keep up, seemed to him futile. He was rather glad when Jocelyne announced that the Master would be pretty sure now to call a halt for lunch. By going a little farther down to where the bridge crossed the river they could have come up with the Field, which was indeed in

sight across a deep channel. It was scattering in groups about to partake of sandwiches. But it appeared that they two were to form a Field of their own in which Jocelyne was the Master.

"It's so hateful picnicing in crowds, isn't it?" she said. She had seated herself as she spoke on a green stone within easy reach of the river. "It's perfect here."

Illingborough agreed, with forced politeness. "But I'm afraid I'm rather dull company," he said. "Are you sure you wouldn't prefer to cross over and join them, and find out what they've been doing?"

"Quite sure," said Jocelyne. "They'll only be talking their horrid sporting shop. *You* don't want to hear that, I know."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't convey much to me," Illingborough had to admit. "But I should rather like, if you don't mind, trying to get close for a bit later on, just to see how the hounds do work. I suppose that must be the charm of the thing, though of course I shouldn't appreciate it properly."

"We'll cross over, then, as soon as we've finished," said Jocelyne agreeably. "They're sure to try the Hack backwater next. But there's no hurry. How my feet do ache!"

"Are you sure," said Illingborough, "that you wouldn't prefer me to see you home from here?"

"Oh no, I wouldn't spoil your day for anything," said Jocelyne.

Nothing that Illingborough could urge would make Jocelyne forego this unselfish attitude, which somehow or other put him in the undesirable position of forcing a footsore maiden to tramp the country, hours after she was worn out, for his sole edification. It is probable that she saw the advantages to be won from this position more clearly than he saw the disadvantages, though he found himself becoming deeply apologetic as well as reluctantly grateful almost directly afterwards, and wished he had not mentioned his curiosity to see the hounds at close quarters.

As it happened, moreover, Jocelyne's determination not to keep him back resulted, curiously enough, in achieving an unexpected delay. For, just as they were about to start for the bridge, she conceived the notion that the only way for her to qualify for a real trudge with the hounds was to bathe her feet. She besought Illingborough to go on and leave her while she paddled. The others might start, she said, while she was in the water, and she would not delay him for anything. Illingborough would not, of course, hear of this plan; and therefore walked up and down while Jocelyne let the water trickle over her toes and splashed white ankles in the sunshine.

He did not watch the performance, having taken quite solemnly her request "not to notice," though Heaven knows paddling is an innocent enough matter. She was piqued into taking her time, viewed only by a Kingfisher, and before her stockings were on again and the boots, which seemed a little tighter than before, were laced, the start by those on the other side had been made.

She called to him at last that she was ready, and got up panting with her efforts.

"Now we must run, if we've to catch them up!" she said, and was disgusted to find that he actually expected her to run. The only consolation was that running would get her into the fevered, excited state in which she wished to be.

She had determined somehow or other to make him propose to her that day, and she had fancied in the beginning that it would be easy—the amusement of a summer's afternoon. She had planned it all out—his humble approach at her feigned gracious encouragement, his stammered words, and her sweet pretence of acceptance—a half-real courtship rather gratifying at the moment, and how laughable to look back on afterwards. She might even feel a little pity for him, if he were very devoted and excessively humble. He was not the sort of man she could in reality even half fall in love with, but

she could enjoy and even feel kindly towards any one's devotion.

And now he was turning out a regular stone. Her conquest wasn't going to be easy at all, or in the least amusing. She would have to do much more than graciously lure him. How much more she could not tell yet.

Now and then she took a sideways glance at him as they ran together, following the distant music. He looked as sober as ever, though he must be getting hot. She bit her lip and increased the pace.

"Don't tire yourself too much," he said anxiously.

"I—I'm not tired," gasped Jocelyne. "I want you to see the fun."

They had crossed the bridge and the road that ran alongside beyond it, and she pointed to a footpath through a perpendicular piece of woodland that led up from the one river-valley and sloped down into the valley of the Hack beyond.

"That's our way," she said, between a smile and sob. "Haven't we flown! Pull me, please."

Illingborough received a hot small hand into his own, and went ahead tugging. He was breathless himself by the time they had got to the top—a ridge of firs and thin birches through which, away below, was visible the silver wind of the Hack. There was no sign of the hunt at first, but they had not paused a

moment before the upstream valley to the left rang with a full-throated chorus.

"They've found!" said Jocelyne. "We shall just be in time. They're on the other side. Come on!"

She darted ahead of him, with a look that somehow seemed to challenge him. To what? Lumbering in her wake, he wondered, and felt his uneasiness of the night before rising again. Why had he not taken precautions not to be alone with her? If he was not careful, he might very easily, it seemed—and without any intention on his part, it also seemed—do or say something that would confirm in her a notion that he entertained feelings which he was quite positive he did not entertain—a notion which, seeing in what a very painful position it would place her and in what a very awkward position it would place himself, he would not willingly, for anything that could be offered him, think of confirming. Trying to plan some commonplace way out of this predicament, and little thinking that his fate was upon him, Illingborough arrived at the brink of the Hack.

Jocelyne had got there first, and she stood as if waiting for him.

"It's deep," she said, "isn't it?"

"I'm afraid it is," said Illingborough, wading in. The water threatened to come up to his waist. "I'm

afraid it's too deep for you," he added, preparing to come back.

She looked at him.

"Could you carry me?" she asked softly.

"May I?" said Illingborough. His politeness had not forsaken him, but his luck had. She came to the edge of the water and held up her arms to him in a helpless, self-surrendering way.

"If you would like to," she said, and the next moment he had her in his arms and was blundering across the stream with a sensation as though some one had hit him over the head with a club. In this mentally stunned condition he became conscious that her hair was in his face and her arms about his neck, and that she was whispering to him that she was not frightened. He was frightened of what would happen when the opposite bank was reached. She was no weight, but the traverse of the little stream seemed interminable. He came up out of it feeling like a man in a dream, she still clinging to him and now whispering that she knew he had loved her all the time. Whether in a dream or no Illingborough was a man, and there seemed to be no help for this amazing error except one. He put her down gently on the little green slope of bank. Then he asked her to be his wife.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FEELINGS OF AN ENGAGED MAN

NEITHER could have told the other exactly how long they stayed on that little grassy slope of bank where Illingborough had set Jocelyne down; and they might have been excused this inexactitude of knowledge, for if they passed through less tumult of feeling than real lovers, the tumult in any case was not small.

Jocelyne's emotion took the form of fear at what she had done, and no little shame, alternating with gratification at the prospect of ambitions shortly to be realised, and anxiety lest something should go wrong. She had done so much more meanly than she had expected to have to do that her modesty—long suppressed—threatened to rise and rend her. Again, what remained to be done began to bulk enormous and depress her with its immensity. Was it all going to be worth while? And could she go on pretending? She thought at first that she could not, and found that she had given herself

less credit for ability to play a part than she deserved.

The discovery did not prevent her from being angry with Illingborough, whom she had meant to pity. It was he who was forcing her to go on pretending. Why couldn't he leave her alone and go away? She reflected that he was pretending too, so far as that went. She forgot that he was pretending at the sacrifice of himself, while she was pretending for her own petty sake; and, forgetting this with an agility amazing in a young girl, she found it easier than she had expected to go on pretending. She needed to do that, because in truth he did not pretend whole-heartedly. He ought—she considered—to have pretended to think himself the luckiest man in the world, instead of explaining, tediously and lengthily (oh, how she hated that tedious manner of his, so different from Clifford's!), that he ought not to have proposed to her as he did (as though he could help it!) because, although he trusted that his income would be sufficient to keep them in moderate comfort, it was not a large one, and he would never, he feared, be able to provide her with the luxuries that perhaps she had a right to expect. Why didn't he mention her uncle's fortune when he must know that she would now inherit it—who else?—and that wives usually shared their money with their husbands?

She was not going to marry him, of course, and she did him the justice, even while she was getting angry and angrier at his platitudes, to be certain that no thought of that fortune had induced him to make the offer of marriage. That—she repeated contemptuously to herself—he could not help. But why could he not mention the fortune, seeing that it was the one thing of real interest to her ?

He came no nearer to it—and she was not ready as yet to cajole him nearer—than in saying that there was one thing in particular which made his proposal not only, he was afraid, inopportune, but also unfair in many ways, both to her and to others, and he must ask her to remember that, for it might make a great difference to her feeling for him, and in any case they must talk it over very seriously, though not now.

Naturally, Jocelyne had to pretend that nothing would make any difference in her affections, and that she was in no way curious. Illingborough thanked her gratefully, though not with the effusion of a lover. He could not indeed evoke even the ghost of a lover's feeling. Now less than ever did that ecstasy which the poets speak of—which makes the grass seem greener and the birds more melodious and the sun a dazzling bewilderment—possess him. He felt, on the contrary, intensely practical in a dismal

way, as though he might be an undertaker arranging the details of his own interment. He tried to rid himself of this selfish feeling. She—poor girl—was to be pitied, and not he. A man has his work to do in the world, and can dispense with love. He had dispensed with it so far. Not she. She, by some extraordinary fatality, had bestowed her love upon a man who had no conception of love—who seemed incapable of it.

A sudden vision of Anne, as he had first seen her, rising from the sea, swept his brain. If he had carried her across the river, and felt her hair in his face, and heard her whisper ?

The vision was stifled, and tingling with what he took to be shame at his unbridled thoughts, Illingborough addressed himself to the decent arrangement of his life's remains. The future would take that funereal aspect. But he could be sure of making a model husband, ecstasies apart. He could devote himself to Jocelyne without fear of wearying. He was not, he felt sure, the sort of man to marry and desert her. Otherwise, even at the risk of outraging her maiden love, he would explain now what a mistake the whole thing was.

He almost wished that he was not so sure of his ability to do his duty, and tried to persuade himself that he was mistaken, and did not succeed.

They talked spasmodically, and not of the things that Illingborough had somehow expected from his occasional readings of the literature of the affections. She did not, for example, want to know when he had first loved her, or how much he did so, or why. If she had wanted to know, he felt sure that he would have made some blunder that would have revealed the inadequacy of his feelings. His relief at not being questioned was tempered by his desire to be found out; but, as the moments went by and the chances of the latter waned, the feeling of relief became predominant. It is a relief of a kind to know that, though one's future will be grey and blank, it will not be spent on the edge of hideous precipices, in a nightmare temptation to cry out words that must not be spoken because they make existence unthinkable and dishonoured.

Otter-hunting—the subject to which they had reverted—might be supplemented in the course of time by other topics in which they were, or could become, mutually interested—such as house-furnishing, the affairs of friends, politics. Many fascinating little points often arise in the course of a lawyer's business. These he could jot down, and talk over with Jocelyne during the long winter evenings.

They had got back to otter-hunting mainly for the reason that, both being eager to find something to say

that should give them an excuse for talking of things that did not matter, the distant cry of the hounds had simultaneously appealed to them. Jocelyne asked if Illingborough could now distinguish the fox-hounds' note. Illingborough fancied he could not, and then fancied he could. Was that because they were coming nearer? It seemed that they were. They had passed up the valley at first and out of earshot; now it was becoming clearer and clearer that they were returning. The fact reminded Illingborough that they two were not for ever alone upon the face of the earth. He had had a sort of feeling that they were alone—not indeed the feeling of the lover who exults in it, but rather a vague, desperate Robinson-Crusoe sort of feeling. The prospect of other people coming up at once stimulated and confused him. Jocelyne had begun to look thoughtful. An audible cry of "Down water," showing quarry was coming down stream, moved her to speak.

"They'll be here in a minute," she said. "What shall we do?"

"Go back before they arrive?" said Illingborough, though his heart fell as he proposed it.

"No," said Jocelyne. "There's hardly time, for one thing. Besides, I want you to see some of it. I'm afraid I've spoilt your otter-hunting for to-day,"

—she smiled gently,—“and I feel that I must try and make up for it. You can go on from here with them, and I shall go back by myself when they’ve passed.”

“I couldn’t think of allowing that,” said Illingborough chivalrously.

“But I wish it,” she said. “I don’t want you to come back with me.”

She spoke so positively that though it seemed a curious state of affairs to Illingborough—in spite of its representing his own sentiment—he could not but believe her.

“You really mean it?” he asked. “I don’t care twopence about the hunting.”

She nodded.

“Really and truly,” she said. “Oh, listen, they’re coming. There’s only one thing more. We needn’t tell everybody about it, need we? I mean, tell them we’re engaged.”

“Do you wish nobody to be told at all?” asked Illingborough.

“Well, perhaps we shall have to tell my family, but no one else.”

“Certainly.”

“Hark!”

The hunting cries that Illingborough had heard before were coming towards them merrily. There

were appeals to the hounds to "Try for him," "For'ard on," "Mark him there"—things that grew to a mild babel as they came nearer.

"Oh, look!" said Jocelyne. "They're on a drag again. Oh, I saw the otter. Tally-ho!"

Whether Jocelyne had seen him vent or not, she would have tallied in her excitement, but in any case the Field was well up. Now on either side of the river came the hubbub of the hunt, people striding along the bank, splashing along the edge of the water—singly, in couples, in groups—excited, noisy, hustling. Illingborough, as he watched, saw Captain Hatton pass, also Anne and Miss Hatton together.

"Please go!" said Jocelyne. She had just caught sight among the followers of the hunt coming along her bank of the Hack of somebody whom she wished particularly to speak to. How senseless Mr. Illingborough was! Why would he not go when she bade him? She waved her hand at him peremptorily, and his hesitations vanished; and he hurried along the bank to join the others. While he was still in view but with his back turned, the person she had noted came up with Jocelyne.

"I want to walk home with you," she said, in a low voice. "Go on a little and then come back. It's no use everybody seeing everything."

Clifford obeyed her with a smile and went on.

Jocelyne stood where she was, and waved her hand again to Illingborough as he turned to look back at her. He also went on and was soon lost with the hunt in the dip of the valley.

CHAPTER XXII

ANNE WALKS HOME ALONE

THE second kill ended the day's sport. From that flurry in a bleak pool where now only a few rays of the setting sun came (and the last otter fought gamely against hounds made keen with the blood of his predecessor) Illingborough kept aloof. He had a great pity for the poor creature,—for all poor creatures,—and if he had hunted it with the rest, it was with no desire to take its life. The chase had not excited him ; he had followed blindly like a sheep following a flock. The going had not even roused him from the stupid state into which he had drifted since leaving Jocelyne.

He had not spoken to Anne since he had joined the hunt, though he had walked beside her at times and behind her at others ; and when he found her close to him on the bank above the pool, he only felt rather glad to know that she also had no desire to watch the otter's death, and he experienced no particular wish to talk to her. It was indeed with an effort,

and because silence seemed strained, that he addressed her a remark to the effect that he hoped the poor beast would get away. He did not speak with any enthusiasm. Anne nodded.

"But I don't suppose he will," she said.

"One never does," said Illingborough hoarsely; and then, conscious that that must sound curious coming from a man recently plighted—which she would shortly know him to be—added irrelevantly, "I mean, it's all been very—interesting——"

Anne looked at him sharply. She had never heard him talk like that before or look like that. A man never looks his nattiest at the end of an otter-hunt. Earth and water have combined to exact from him some of the sport that he has sought from the otter. Illingborough had had his share of wading. He was splashed with mud. But so were all the other men. So was Anne herself, for that matter. Looking at him, she became aware that it was not his outward appearance that gave him so much the look of a man who has been in the sloughs. It was the dazed expression of his eyes. He was not an excessively good actor, though in an emergency no one probably would try harder.

"Anything the matter?" she said curtly, as he stood looking away from her.

"No," said Illingborough. "That is to say—yes—"

I mean"—he sought at the back of his brain for the right word—"I'm—I'm the luckiest of men."

"You don't somehow look it," she said. Her glance was as steadfast as before, and her voice as calm, though inside her some instinct was hammering a warning on her heart. "Why?" she asked.

"Your sister"—said Illingborough—"your sister"—

"Jos?" said Anne, and knew the worst before he spoke.

"—has consented to do me the honour of promising to become my wife." Even in his stupor the proprieties of expression were thoughtfully and duly enunciated by Illingborough. He would have tried to thank courteously the fireman who was sliding with him through dense smoke down a fire-escape. "I can never thank her sufficiently," he added, after a momentary cast for the right phrase.

"I shouldn't try, then," said Anne.

It was so exactly what she would have replied to him in normal circumstances, and Illingborough was so used to her brusqueness, that even if he had been in a critical mood he would not have noted that for this occasion only it was mistrust of her voice that made her so sharply short. He went on clumsily—

"Of course I do not consider Jocelyne bound. Mr. Wetherborne may not sanction an engagement which

he cannot think in any way an advantage to his daughter."

If he hoped that she would second this somewhat improbable account of her father's attitude he was disappointed.

"He will say, 'Really? Jocelyne! Dear me!'" said Anne. She had a feeling of rebellion against the parent who would so lightly and indifferently accept so great a fact, as though he were in some way responsible for what had come about.

Then she remembered it was Jocelyne who had controlled, and would control, the situation—for an end sordid and selfish enough, if that story of Tom's were true. For a moment she hated Jocelyne. Why could she not have taken that fortune which was nothing to Anne, and left her—what? All the world in one sense—and in another nothing. What, after all, could Jocelyne have left? She could take Illingborough away, but she could not in any case have given him to her—Anne.

A man's love—that love that had so puzzled her—was like the wind. It blew where it listed; and it had never listed her way. Mr. Illingborough thought nothing of her. Why should he, indeed?

Seeing herself, as she supposed, with his eyes, she saw that she could never have been Jocelyne's rival, and her hatred of her sister died away, leaving only

that slight scorn which Jocelyne's methods always evoked in her. What did it matter, after all? Some one less cunning might have caught him. She would have preferred that it should have been some one who would take him far away, so that she should never see him again or see her in his arms. Otherwise, it did not greatly concern her if it were Jocelyne or another. In the end he would have wanted—as men do—some one clinging and tender, some one beautiful, some one that had more of the woman in her than Anne could boast or, up to that moment, had ever wished to boast. Even now—and for that end—she could not picture herself with sidling eyes and outstretched arms and fond words, such as women use, making strength out of their weakness, for the trapping of men.

She came back from these thoughts to a consciousness that she must get away from him. It appeared that he was still talking, in his rambling, self-deprecatory fashion, about the little he had to offer, and the sort of men Jocelyne might have looked for.

"Oh, it's all right," she said, with a sort of tolerant impatience. "I don't think you need anticipate all sorts of obstacles that don't at present exist. You aren't a millionaire, perhaps, or a Lord Chief Justice, or even a senior partner, but I don't know that Joce-

lyne ever expected one. Anyhow, she's probably turned things over, you know."

"Do you think so?" said Illingborough anxiously.

"I'm certain of it," said Anne. "And now I must be going. You don't seem to have Jocelyne with you?"

"She felt that she wanted to be by herself," Illingborough explained. "Are you not going on with the Hunt?"

"They're chucking it."

There were indeed signs of men and hounds coming up on to the bank in the leisurely, easy way signifying that the strain of their sport was over.

"Then may I," Illingborough said, with melancholy eagerness, "have the pleasure of seeing you back?"

Anne shook her head. It was the last thing she wanted, though she could not explain why to him.

"No, thank you," she said.

"I should most awfully like to," he pleaded, and she could have struck him in the face for his blindness. She only said in her level voice—

"Sorry not to oblige. But I have an escort. You're only about three miles from the house. Take the first stile on the left, and you'll hit the Mazinghope road. The left! Not the right!"

She watched him go off rather like a blind man

without his dog, and was about to take another road herself—for she had not, as she had told him, arranged an escort—when Captain Hatton came up to her.

“ Won’t you come and have some tea ? ” he said. “ There’s an inn quite close. Several of the people are going—my sister for one.”

“ I’d rather get back, thank you,” said Anne.

“ Really ? I’ll walk a bit of the way with you, if I may. Decent day, eh ? Two of ’em ! About the best sport they’ve ever had here, I should say.” He walked on beside her, a self-contained, easy, vigorous, cheerful man. Tactful too, for when Anne said, “ Oughtn’t you to see to your sister ? ” scarcely knowing herself that her desire to be alone expressed itself in her tone, though not at all in her words, he seemed to have understood.

“ If you’d like me to,” he said at once. “ I’d rather escort you, if I may—for several particular reasons.”

She was not sure what he meant, and felt worried, and looked it.

“ Say you find me a nuisance, and I’m off at once,” he said lightly, and added, “ It’s for you to say, Miss Anne. But anything that you say will mean a great deal to me.”

She knew then what was in his mind, and answered

gravely, "If it's only the walk you want, please come, and I should like it."

He stopped directly.

"It isn't only the walk," he said, and without more ado made his proposal.

What amazed her as she listened was that suddenly she was completely understanding things that only a few hours before had been nothing but a puzzle to her. She had thought this man only yesterday the victim of a queer ailment of gallantry—that itch to philander which she had noted indeed in many men and girls but thought of as something absurd and weak and temporary. Now she knew that he loved her, and that love is terrible and great and makes all the years of a man's life uplifted or overcast.

There are those who, having seen that sun without flinching, can yet face unlighted prospects and can credit others with their own courage. Anne was among them. Otherwise, in her pity she might have been drawn to promise what she could not fulfil. He was eloquent and sincere, and made her feel that on her answer to him most of his hopes and all of his ambition depended—so he said and seemed to believe. He took her "No" standing up, though she gave him to understand that the refusal was unconditional and that neither soon nor late was there any hope of her surrender. She did not tell him that she liked and

admired him, though these were facts. Never fluent, she knew that there were no words that could make black at that moment seem to be any other colour. Nor did she delay the necessary parting.

She was conscious that she had never felt so tired as she did that evening walking home alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. WETHERBORNE IS TRIED. JOAN IS ROUTED

AT the hour of 11.20 on the morning following the otter-hunt Mr. Wetherborne might have been observed making his way leisurely—but in a distinctly aggrieved frame of mind—towards Porton Langley. Overnight, he had given his consent to Jocelyne's engagement, using very much the language Anne had in her bitterness prophesied.

"You want my little Jocelyne! You surprise me, my dear boy," Mr. Wetherborne had said, laying down his newspaper and swiftly taking it up again. "I had no idea of such a thing—positively."

"But you can trust her to me?" said Illingborough, in a voice that faltered.

"Of course! Of course!" said Mr. Wetherborne. "I shall miss my little housekeeper sadly, but Mrs. Odler will do her best. And I have the greatest confidence in you. There is no doubt you understand one another."

Illingborough thanked him. He could not help

being aware that Mr. Wetherborne would have said precisely the same thing if anybody else had asked him for Jocelyne, or if he himself had requested the hand of either Anne or Joan. With equal geniality Mr. Wetherborne would have resigned any one—or indeed all—of his daughters, and would have reposed an equally flattering confidence in any suitor that happened to turn up. It would have been wrong to wish that his future father-in-law was one of those who delight in making their daughters' marriage a prolonged obstacle race, yet Illingborough could have desired that Mr. Wetherborne had, instead of bringing out a bottle of champagne to drink his and Jocelyne's future prosperity, been willing to enter into the ways and means that make for prosperity.

Mr. Wetherborne, on the other hand, could not understand Illingborough's insistence upon the discussion of such vulgar matters as income, profession, and the date of marriage. Over his glass he waved them away.

"Yes, yes, my dear boy, but we all have to make a start," he said. "I had to myself. Here is long life to you!"

Fortified by his wine, he was under the impression that he had quieted Illingborough's scruples, and his disgust was great when he found, on coming down to a late breakfast in the morning, Illingborough

waiting for him with an earnest face, to request an interview from him.

"But we talked it all over last night," said Mr. Wetherborne pettishly.

"Not everything," said Illingborough.

"Oh, I think so," said Mr. Wetherborne, pouring himself a cup of coffee. "I should say so, from what I remember. We talked a long time, my dear boy. You've forgotten. It's the natural excitement of the thing. Where is the little witch who is responsible?"

But Illingborough was not to be put off in that airy manner.

"She has gone for a short walk. I told her that I——"

"Not quarrelled, I trust?" interrupted Mr. Wetherborne lightly.

"No," said Illingborough. They had indeed neither quarrelled nor renewed the temporary ardour of that moment in which they had so unexpectedly plighted themselves the previous day, but had as it were reserved themselves—during the few minutes they had been together at the breakfast table—for something that was to come later. Neither Anne nor Joan had been present, which made it easier to chat at random. "I told Jocelyne," Illingborough went on, "that there is one thing in particular I must explain to her before I can feel that she really

knows me. She asked me to tell it to her when she came back from her walk. I agreed to that because I thought it best on the whole to tell you first."

The length and austerity of his future son-in-law's speech alarmed Mr. Wetherborne.

"Have it out with Jocelyne, my dear boy," he said hastily. "Don't bother about me. I am not curious. Never was. I can remember that virtue—call it vice if you will—attracting the attention of my old friend, General Hayling. Hayling had a shoot somewhere in the Highlands, as I happened to know—though not exactly where—and he invited me up by telegram. As it happened, he forgot to put his name or address to it. I didn't bother about that—took the Northern Express for the nearest station to the telegraph office, and turned up in due course. Hayling was astonished. 'Didn't you want to know,' he said, 'who'd asked you?' 'No,' I replied. 'I have several excellent friends in the Highlands—and if you'd denied the invitation, I should have tried the others in rotation.' Curious!"

"Very!" said Illingborough. "About this other matter, I intend to tell Jocelyne in any case. But I think you should know of it too. Of course I won't disturb you at breakfast."

"That's it," said Mr. Wetherborne, relieved. "No business at breakfast. A capital rule."

"Then perhaps I may come and find you in an hour?"

"Well—if you must," said Mr. Wetherborne.

"I'll come to your room at 11.30 if I may," said Illingborough.

The decision in his voice was so great, and the prospect of a serious interview so portentous, that—after balancing the comparative evils of the two courses—Mr. Wetherborne decided that it would be better to hurry over his breakfast and go out for the day than take his usual time and be caught in his room. He had often before found procrastination a great help to him.

Hence the possibility, for any one on that road himself, of observing Mr. Wetherborne at 11.20 a.m. proceeding in a leisurely way, but in a highly aggrieved state of mind, towards Porton Langley.

Hence also the failure of Illingborough, when he went to his room at the appointed hour, to find him.

It was a hot, breathless day, with thunder in the air, and Illingborough, who had only had a few hours of sleep—and these broken by nightmares such as he had never experienced before—felt the unwonted stupidity of the previous afternoon gaining upon him again. What was he to do? Wait for Mr. Wetherborne's return, which might not be, he realised, before evening, or tell Jocelyne as soon as she came

in of the strange commission which had brought him to the Sea House ?

He would have liked advice upon the matter. Again, he would have liked some one to assure him that he was right in revealing his secret at all. He thought that he was right. A graver wrong would be done by keeping it. And after all, secrecy had not been enjoined on him—as witness Mr. Mortlake's cynical words. The gravest wrong of all had really been his acceptance of the instructions—for apart from the lowering thereby of the standards of professional conduct, he had by his own inefficiency—by his inability to maintain the attitude of a judge—grievously wronged two people. Jocelyne he had condemned to a loveless marriage, Anne to the loss of a fortune. For somehow he knew now that—if there was any justice in the thing at all—Anne was the rightful heiress. An ideal judge would have given the verdict in her favour. He himself—far from ideal as he was—had given it unconsciously, and he was conscious that he had given it rightly. But he was not fit to pronounce it.

Therefore he had robbed Anne, and this he must confess. His confession to Jocelyne must be that though he had asked her to marry him, he considered Anne greater than her.

It did not strike Illingborough, in spite of his all-

consuming modesty, that this confession might alter Jocelyne's regard for him. Possibly he had under-cultivated the humorous sense. Certainly he contemplated the confession merely as an act of fairness towards her. He must tell her—since it was bound to come out—that his judgement pronounced the sentence which a life's devotion and patience and gratitude would endeavour to atone for. The gratitude, devotion, and patience would of course be some slight return for the affection she had granted to the most unworthy person who, being far below her himself in every possible way (and really Illingborough went to zero in his own estimation), had the unfortunate perspicuity to notice that she was not, as it were, on the highest peak of all.

Martyrs are said at times to have hugged their stakes. Illingborough, on the contrary, had one of the strongest impulses he had ever felt to disappear from the Sea House and bury himself in the remotest corner of the world before Jocelyne came in. It is tolerably certain that his life's training would have got the better of this impulse in any case, but, as it happened, he was prevented from carrying it into effect by meeting Joan in the hall. She was sorting out the morning's letters which the postman had just delivered.

"Good - morning, Mr. Illingborough," she said.

"There is a letter here for you. After you have read it, I should like to speak to you, if you can spare me a moment or two."

"Certainly, with pleasure," said Illingborough, and apologised for reading his letter first. He had seen that the address was in Mr. Waterlane's handwriting. He tore open the envelope, and found the following, written with all the cryptic carefulness of the old-world lawyer:—

MR. ILLINGBOROUGH,—*Re* Mr. Mortlake's instructions. I regret to state that our client has received somewhat untoward report of state of health from medical attendant, with result that he, client as above, is desirous of hastening as far as convenient the pronouncement of your opinion upon matter under consideration. Kindly write therefore per return post giving if possible name of selection as agreed upon, if any; if not, earliest date, or dates, upon which aforesaid selection is likely to be made.—I am,
Yours truly, TAUNTON T. WATERLANE.

Illingborough put the letter in his pocket, distressed to know that Mr. Mortlake was worse, at a moment when he himself must in the nature of things cause him disappointment, but none the less determined to throw up instructions which he ought never to have accepted. Mr. Waterlane, he felt sure, would

agree with him, though he would regret the impossibility of humouring the views of an old friend and client. The sooner he wrote and explained how matters stood, the better it would be ; and he resolved to write as soon as his interview with Joan had come to an end.

She had been waiting for him in the hall while he read his letter, and looked at him with her serious expression when he signified that he was at her service.

"Thank you," she said. "I daresay you have noticed, Mr. Illingborough,—or perhaps I ought now to say John,—that I have not expressed my feelings to you on the subject of your engagement with Jocelyne."

"Not at all," said Illingborough, thinking that she was doing so. "I mean, thanks very much. Very kind of you."

"One minute, please," said Joan, holding up a finger. "I have not done so, Mr. Illingborough—or shall I say John—for the time being? I would rather you did not call me Joan, I think, until you have heard what I have to say. But I have no objection to calling you John, if you would prefer it?"

Illingborough, somewhat bewildered, conveyed that her pleasure in this matter would be his.

"Very well. I think there can be no harm in my

saying John," said Joan, not ungratified by the hold it somehow gave her. "Why I have not congratulated you, John, is that I cannot, try as I may, feel happy about it. I have tried to, John, for your sake as well as Jocelyne's. But I cannot. I hope I do not hurt your feelings by saying so."

Illingborough was too depressed himself to derive any frivolous pleasure from the sight of Joan's primmed lips.

"I should feel sorry, of course, if you disapproved," he said.

Having satisfied herself by a perusal of his features that no irony lurked in his words, Joan gave a little sigh—really of satisfaction, but meant to be taken as one of dismal sympathy.

"It is not of you yourself, John, that I disapprove," she said. "In many ways I should welcome you as my brother. We do not agree on all points, but that would not be essential."

"As long as we got on in a general way," suggested Illingborough.

"Quite so," said Joan. "It is possible that as we got to know each other more, you would think more like me about many things. I mean, we should appreciate one another's views more. I should not wish to force my views on you."

"Is there such a divergence?" asked Illingborough.

"I am afraid so," said Joan. "But it does not matter. I did not mean to talk of that. I am not influenced by it when I say that I think it will be a mistake for you to marry Jocelyne."

"Why?" asked Illingborough.

"Because," said Joan, softly, but firmly, "because it would not be fair to poor Mr. Clifford."

"Clifford!" said Illingborough, completely astonished. Joan nodded. With great difficulty she kept her face in the rigid and austere lines proper to one who has taken upon herself so delicate and painful a mission. Strive as she would, the subdued satisfaction of intervening, self-sacrificingly, to prevent a fatal error, threatened to get mixed with the more earthy ecstasy of putting a spoke, so to say, in Jocelyne's wheel. Jocelyne deserved it for her horrid and hateful and unsisterly insinuations about Odo. She would find she could not insult her sister with impunity.

"Yes," said Joan, gloating. "Poor Mr. Clifford. Perhaps you do not realise that before you came here Mr. Clifford was in love with Jocelyne?"

"I had no idea of it," said Illingborough.

"Or that he still is?"

"No. I didn't know that either," said Illingborough. The hope that had sprung up for a moment died down again. "Even if he were, you know, and Jocelyne

happens to prefer me, it can scarcely be helped, can it? I almost think"—Illingborough became rather grave, chiefly with self-reproach, that he had allowed something like rebellion to rise in his heart—"that if there is any ground for your supposition at all, it would be better to say and see nothing of it—besides being kinder to Clifford."

The rebuke directed against himself hit Joan none the less hard. She had been so convinced that she would make things nasty for Jocelyne, and that in any case her unselfish intervention would be appreciated, that Illingborough's stupidity infuriated her. He had actually charged her with unkindness.

"Very well—John—Mr. Illingborough, as I shall say in future. It has nothing to do with me, of course. If you like to be selfish, and supplant Mr. Clifford, and marry a flirt, you can do so. Only—only——"

"Only what?"

It was Jocelyne who spoke, having entered at that moment. She had heard the last few words, and more or less imagined the conversation, Clifford and she having amused themselves a good deal over Joan's self-imposed mission on behalf of the former. She looked very arch and pretty and humorous, standing there in the doorway, complete mistress of the situation.

"Only what, my dear?"

Joan went brick red.

"Wouldn't it be nicer, Joanie," said Jocelyne, in her sweetest, most elder-sisterly manner, "if you gave up meddling and mischief-making now that you are growing such a big girl? We should all love you more if you did, and I am sure you would be happier yourself."

Joan choked. It was the one attitude of Jocelyne's that rendered her completely helpless.

"I—I——" she stammered. "I——"

"Try my advice!" said Jocelyne silkily.

"I—I—hate you!" spluttered Joan, and rushed from the house.

CHAPTER XXIV

JOCELYNE LEARNS THE DISADVANTAGES OF CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

"SHALL we go out into the garden for our talk?" said Jocelyne.

They had stood there in the hall for a full minute watching Joan disappear, without anything being said except "Poor little Joan!" by Jocelyne, in a tone that she intended Illingborough to receive as an amiable and forgiving one. He had done so, and been pleased by it, for if he could never love he was at least eager—anxious, perhaps, would be a better word—to admire his fiancée. He was pleased that she did not now refer further to Joan's meddling. It seemed to him dignified as well as kind.

"Yes, let us go out by all means," he said, almost warmly. "I should like some fresh air."

"Yet you had a great deal of it yesterday, John. I ought to call you John now, oughtn't I?" said Jocelyne. "It seems so strange, John!"

It seemed even stranger to Illingborough. He had

few relations or friends who called him by his Christian name. Jocelyne's cooing of it made him feel somehow like a performing dog suddenly called upon to take part in a Greek tragedy. At least he could try and go through his tricks nicely.

"And I may call you Jocelyne?" he asked.

"Anything you please," she said, with a soft glance.

"Thank you," he said hurriedly. He had a horrid foreboding that she would expect him to call her something even more familiar and pointedly affectionate. Would "my dear" do, he wondered? There was a breaking-point. "Shall we sit down here?" he continued, lest that breaking-point should be reached.

They had reached the end of the lawn in front of the house, before the garden began to dip for the sea. Jocelyne sat down obediently, under the shade of some tamarisk.

"I am awfully anxious to know what your mysterious news can be," she said lightly; and added—"I needn't tell you that nothing will make any difference to my feelings."

She felt self-possessed and sprightly, very different from what she had been during those first minutes that had followed his proposal. Then she had been ashamed of herself, nervous, ill at ease. The walk

back with Clifford had set her up. He had mingled praise and amusement in a way that had made her feel the heroine of a comedy in which Illingborough was only one of the main characters. He had vowed that she deserved to go on the London stage, if it were not that she deserved to enter the even jollier profession of an heiress. And she would become an heiress. He was certain of that. All that remained for her to do was to induce Illingborough to submit her name to her uncle. Of course she must make him promise to keep her engagement a secret from Mr. Mortlake. There would be no difficulty about that. Illingborough would see the force of it as well as she. Even if he had the sort of canting scruples that would make him dislike the idea of benefiting himself by keeping the secret, he would keep it out of justice to her.

Then she would go up to town, be on her prettiest behaviour, win her uncle's heart, and in a little while inherit his fortune.

Clifford had kept to the brighter side of what was going to happen throughout their conversation, and he presented it skilfully. Jocelyne was not to take the view that she was deceiving an old man,—not far, perhaps, from death,—but rather to remember that she would by her tact and charm soothe and cheer what remained to him of life. She was just the

person to do it. As for Illingborough, though she would have to deceive him, of course, had he not all along acted in a way that was very near to, if it was not actually, deceiving her ?

It was tit for tat. He might have named Anne, but for the charms Jocelyne had laid upon him. Clifford skirted that point rather quickly, for it brought into prominence the fact that Anne—and Joan too—would suffer by Jocelyne's triumph. He managed somehow to make out that Jocelyne would have triumphed in any case. She herself felt so generous by anticipation, so lordly in her prospective largesses to her sisters (they would receive from her more than they would ever want), that she was able to shut her eyes to any treachery in her acting.

What Clifford had chiefly dwelt on was the importance of inducing Illingborough to act as soon as possible. She must not let him know, of course, that she knew his secret, but she must get him to tell it to her. Then she could urge him to fulfil his errand.

It seemed to Jocelyne, seated under the shade of the tamarisk with Illingborough beside her, as though that auspicious moment had arrived ; and she could not have been in a better mood to take advantage of it. She smiled to herself at the artful way in which she had just told him how nothing would

change her feelings. It wasn't even a fib; for nothing, she felt sure, would change that mild scorn which he roused in her, for any other emotion. She was so pleased with her skilful trifling that she could not help adding to it. "It will be lovely to feel that you trust me," she said.

Illingborough bent his head.

"It is I who have to ask you to trust me to do what I feel to be right," he said.

"Oh, I'm sure you will," said Jocelyne.

He took Mr. Waterlane's letter out of his pocket, and handed it to her. It had arrived rather conveniently, for without it he would hardly have known how to begin his explanation.

"Would you mind reading that?" he said. "I got it this morning. It will make it easier to explain."

Jocelyne read it with a blank face, but an inward excitement. She understood at once that it served the purpose of hastening matters. Illingborough was asked in the letter to give a prompt reply. What luck that she had so opportunely struck in so as to make any but the one reply impossible.

"What is it all about?" she asked, handing it back to him.

Illingborough began his explanation. It was a long-winded one, in which the description of the exact nature of Mr. Mortlake's instructions was inter-

persed with accounts of the difficulties attending their execution, a disquisition on the various views it was possible to take on the subject of the relations of wealth and virtue, and apologies for having allowed himself to enter the Sea House in what was not only to some extent a false position, but also the unpardonable position of a judge. He was warming to his work, and forgetting, it is possible, some of his present misery while he unfolded the argument of his past doubts and difficulties, when the consciousness that he was approaching the deduction to be made from it—and that the victim of that deduction was facing him—caused him to grow cold, and falter.

“ And so—and so——” he said, “ it seemed that—that——”

“ Yes ? ” said Jocelyne. Her eyes were fixed upon his face with the utmost eagerness. She had not listened to half he said. She had wondered now and then how it was possible for anybody to prose and prose away, as he did, when the matter was all so simple. She had heard his praise of herself (which seemed ample, though stupid), and vague comparisons of her virtues and Anne’s (which did not interest her), and she was only waiting and waiting for him to say—as was obvious—that he had chosen her. Why could he not say it straight out ?

“ Yes ? ” she said encouragingly. “ And so—— ? ”

"And so," said Illingborough, "it seemed that there was only the one thing for me to do—or rather I ought to say two things."

"Two?" echoed Jocelyne. What was he talking about now? "Two things?" she repeated.

"Well, the one inevitable thing, you see, is for me to resign my task altogether."

For the moment Jocelyne's brain refused to work, and Illingborough was almost able to get out the remainder of his characteristically punctuated peroration—

"And the other is to confess to you that, though I appreciate to the full your kindness and—and intelligence—and—amiability—which I shall hope to try and merit a little—though I can never really deserve them, of course—by devoting myself to you, as any one would only too readily do in return for the honour done them by such a promise as you have made to me, still I feel that I should otherwise—and ought to confess it—have—have——"

"Have what?" said Jocelyne hoarsely.

"Named your sister!" said Illingborough, with sudden simplicity.

Jocelyne did not rise or even, for another moment, speak. She sat there with heaving chest and glaring eyes. The audacity of his saying such a thing to her! Did he really think she would allow it—allow

her dreams to be shattered by his apologetic obstinacy and senseless conscientiousness? Did he? She glared at him. What an owl he looked with his stupid grave expression! Oh, but she would show him that he was mistaken in thinking that he could practise on her his wearisome honesty! Fool, fool, fool! Only it would be wisest, perhaps, to go quietly with him. So much was at stake. She would have liked to scream at him. But she *must* win. The way to get round him was to coax him into feeling his absurdness. He was ready enough to do that. The very fact that he had spoken to her before he had acted showed how ready he was to be persuaded of his doltishness. Yes, decidedly she must speak quietly at first. She rose, slowly and gracefully, and looked at him.

“And you expect me to forgive you when you’re as silly as that?”

He marvelled at her gracious tone. Somehow he had expected her to be indignant—as she had a right to be—instead of gracious and tender. He could have wished she had not been tender, but she had a right to be that too, of course. He must try and respond.”

“Do you forgive me?” he asked, with a faint smile.

“If you’ll say that you’ve been talking great nonsense, and will promise never to do it again?”

"I can promise that," he said, more cheerfully. "It isn't a thing I ever wish to speak about. The sooner I can forget it, the better I shall be pleased."

She was hopeful, but not quite sure yet, that he took her meaning.

"Thank you," she said, and put a hand on his arm. "Then you'll go and write to my uncle at once?"

"I was thinking of it."

It looked as if he had understood and yielded. Jocelyne's heart began to sing.

"You'll tell him what a mistake you nearly made?"

"A mistake?"

"In nearly naming Anne?"

The puzzled look had come into Illingborough's face again. She withdrew her hand. "What is it now?" she said pettishly.

"Do I understand," he said, "that you wish me not to withdraw?"

"Of course."

"I am to chose your sister?"

"Anne? Certainly not," said Jocelyne, again feeling what a fool he was.

"Who then?"

"Who should you choose?" Jocelyne gave a little uneasy laugh. "We're engaged, aren't we? I quite understand that you thought there was something in Anne—at one time. But I don't know what you mean

when you say, 'Who, then?' Who should you choose but me?"

There. It was out, and at least there could be no further misunderstanding. There was not.

"That is impossible," said Illingborough.

"Impossible?"

"Yes."

Their eyes met, and Jocelyne's flashed fury.

"Do you dare to say that to me?" she said, very low.

Illingborough made no reply. But for the first time since Jocelyne had met him she realised that if he was a fool, he was not the sort of fool to be turned from his purpose by any arts at her command.

CHAPTER XXV

VEXATION OF LADY START

"So there's no help for it?" said Lady Start. She was sitting on the terrace outside her great house, Anne beside her. In front, as far as the eye could see, there was a view of undulating park land; on the left rich fields, on the right cliff pasture and heather land that rose and fell, giving peeps of the sea. As likely as not, Lady Start had specially selected to sit upon the terrace that morning for the wide and lovely views it gave her, and would give to her successor. She knew that Anne knew that her successor would be Captain Hatton, and though she would most heartily have scorned any one who yielded to the temptation offered by that knowledge, she was not the person to resist making the most of it.

"Positively no use my talking?" she went on.

Anne shook her head.

"Of course," said Lady Start, speaking in her most matter-of-fact voice, "I need hardly say that Stephen hasn't mentioned a word about it to me. I don't

know that he has even looked it to any one else. I doubt if Irene knows it. I knew at once. Why I sent over for you was because I wanted to know for myself if it was hopeless. It looks rather as if it were."

"I'm sorry," said Anne.

Lady Start swept sorrow away with a gesture of her hand as if it were not worth talking about.

"If it can't come off, it can't. I'm wanting to satisfy myself more than interfere. Not that I should mind interfering if it would do any good. I enjoy meddling as a general rule—especially with fools. I see no harm in it. They don't know their own minds; why shouldn't one poke them up? Even if it did harm, I shouldn't mind. Unfortunately, my dear, you're not a fool. I wish you were."

"It's very nice of you," said Anne, answering the meaning rather than her words.

"Oh, I want the match, of course," said Lady Start. "I started being absurd about you before Stephen even saw you. You needn't feel flattered. I always did like impossible people. Serves me right in this particular case, eh?"

"I can't say anything else," said Anne, again answering the unspoken question.

Lady Start looked at her keenly enough, and nodded. Nods are not often tragic, but this one was not far

from being so. She had set her heart on this match, and it was not to be.

"There's only one thing to make me go on babbling," she said, after a pause. "You're young, and you're motherless. That's why I'm going to say that if there's the smallest doubt, give him the benefit of it. It's not mere prejudice. It's not that he's got things to offer that no woman dislikes—money, standing, good friends—this," she pointed ahead of her, "perhaps in no great time either. It's not that. I've known many men—good, bad, indifferent. He's one of the decent ones."

"Yes," said Anne.

"And 'No thank you once more,' you mean?" said Lady Start. "Don't say 'Yes' again, or it'll get on my nerves. I used to like your yes's and no's and want of woman-jabber, but I don't know that I do now. What right have you to know your own mind?"

"None, I dare say," said Anne.

"If you did know it," said Lady Start, "you'd be right to stick to your No. I'm no believer in convenient marriages—for the few people that can make ideal ones. But how few can! Love! Not one person in a thousand knows what it is. People haven't the intelligence. When most people 'love,' it's not their hearts expanding, it's their heads contracting."

“ You think mine is ? ” asked Anne.

“ I wish it would,” said Lady Start fervently. “ But no, you can’t take a man worth ten of you, because you think you’re not one of the elect. You only ‘ admire him,’ I suppose, and like him, and could possibly ‘ respect him.’ ” She mimicked the sort of thing she would have loved to hear Anne say that she might leap on her and demolish her. Her exasperation was largely due to the fact that Anne would say nothing. “ You think he’s ‘ very nice,’ but you ‘ don’t love him enough.’ Not even ‘ enough,’ little mule ! You don’t even confess to loving him at all ! And why, pray ? Whom do you love ? ”

“ Must I love somebody ? ” said Anne calmly. She was too familiar with Lady Start’s sudden pounces to be taken off her guard.

“ Must you ! ” The old lady almost squealed with passion at Anne’s impassivity. “ No, you mustn’t, and needn’t, and never will. You’ll die a spinster made of rock and iron, like what’s his name in the legend. But I believe you do love somebody all the same, and it’s that sober-faced young man, Mr. Illingsomething. Oh, I know he’s got all the virtues, and he’s a poet too—or something like it—odd mixture, but you’ll have a very bad time with him. You haven’t got the virtues, you know, and he’ll point that out—awfully delicately and at immense length—

and you'll have to listen and try to be an angel. And you won't succeed. And then he'll be unhappy, and so will you, and I shall be glad of it ! ”

She fell back in her chair quite exhausted, and Anne said—

“ Mr. Illingborough is going to marry Jocelyne. They became engaged yesterday.”

“ What ! ” said Lady Start, sitting up again as quickly as she had sat back. Anne repeated her information, more calmly than before, because she knew that the old lynx eyes were watching her, and with a new wistfulness. It seemed thereafter that Lady Start's opinion of Illingborough's misery-making capacity was only contingent on his suspected designs upon Anne, for she said—

“ I'm sorry for him. I liked him. Your sister Jocelyne ! ” and remained silent for quite a long time. When she spoke again, it was to dismiss her visitor.

“ Well, Miss Anne Wetherborne,” she said, “ you have told me enough vexatious things for to-day, and the sooner you leave me the better. I can't ask you to lunch, because Stephen will be here, and he might kidnap you if he saw you. I should. So off you go ! ”

Anne rose, and as the old lady nodded her good-bye, said again—

“ You know how sorry I am.”

"I suppose I do," said Lady Start grudgingly.
"Yes, I do, child. And you must come and see me soon, and try and make up for it. Not to-morrow. I shall be ill to-morrow for a certainty, because I'm going to take some whisky and water now to quiet my nerves, and it's sure to get on to my liver."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CRISIS

ANNE had ridden over to Storr Court by the road. She made John Mark carry her home by a longer way that led through steep lanes and out on to the springy turf of the cliffs, where a fast canter made the sultry air move by in the likeness of a breeze. She would have preferred a great blowing wind and clouds scurrying, instead of that stillness around and the sky above looking like dead smoke. She had never known the cliffs so windless and soundless. You could hardly hear the sea. The creatures of the cliffs seemed to share in the general lethargy. Hardly a bird chirped; there were no butterflies chasing from flower to flower; and if rabbits were abroad from their burrows, they lay low as she and John Mark passed, instead of starting up and running for their lives until they became not even quivers in the bracken.

Anne stopped at Coster's Farm—a little stone-built place in a hollow lying behind a few wind-

curled hazels, in a fume of farmyard; and when the farmer's wife came out in response to her call, asked for some bread and a glass of milk. She partook of these without dismounting, chatting the while of farm matters to Mrs. Coster, who was delighted to see the face of a passer-by, though she did not betray it by any volubility.

" Things done well ? " Anne asked.

" Fair, Miss, to middlin'," said Mrs. Coster. "'Twont be our best year."

" Not enough rain for the corn ? "

" Not nigh."

" But it looks as if we were going to get some soon."

" It might be soon," said Mrs. Coster.

" Children all right ? "

" Pretty well, thank you, Miss."

" Been trying pigs this year ? " asked Anne, flitting from subject to subject without embarrassment. Mrs. Coster admitted—as was indeed evident—that they had been trying pigs, and that Mr. Coster believed in them. Then she took the cup from Anne, and watched her ride off, having had a pleasant relaxation from work always hard and sometimes dull as well.

Anne rode along a sheep track down Hagg Combe on to the beach, or rather the undercliff, walking John Mark very slowly. She did not want to get home.

That is why she had eaten and drunk at Coster's Farm. At least that would tide her over lunch. The meals would be the most unbearable things at the Sea House for the next few days. Her father always sat so long over them. If things had not happened as they had, she could have gone over pretty often to Storr Court. She was very sorry for Lady Start—much sorrier for Lady Start than for herself. After all, she—Anne—could find things to do—fishing, sailing—but Lady Start was old. She could not live by doing things any longer; she had to live by thinking, and thoughts, if you have nothing else to fall back on, can be the dreariest things in the world, as sullen as the sky was and as grey as the sea. And there was no hope if you were as old as Lady Start was—or even much younger—of a storm that would come and break them as surely as, very soon, a storm would come and break that sky and sea.

The imminence of the storm, combined with the state of the tide, which compelled Anne to go up on to the cliffs again for the last part of her ride, turned her attention to the practical matter of the safety of her sailing-boat, the *Gull*, which would have to be drawn up and beached if the weather were really rough; and she rode down into the bay to inspect her before stabling her horse.

The little bay was flat and full with the high tide,

so full that the rock platform to which the row-boat was tethered by a ring in the rock was only just above water. The *Gull* rode easily in her channel, anchored stem and stern, and so close in that one could step on board her across the smaller boat without rowing a foot. Decidedly the *Gull* would have to be moved. Both boats would. But whereas the *Merry* could be drawn up by the aid of Tom, and perhaps of Joan and Mrs. Odler, the *Gull* would require extra help. Anne sniffed the sea and took a connoisseur's glance at the leaden horizon. Probably it would be a couple of hours before the storm broke. There would be plenty of time to send Tom up to Mazinghope for extra hands. Still, he had better be sent ; and she rode up to the stable to find him.

As happened as often as not, Tom's presence in the stable was not conspicuous, and having herself rubbed down John Mark—who was sweating merely from the sultriness, for he had walked the best part of the way—Anne went out into the garden to look for the truant. He was not among the vegetables and he was not in the potting shed, and Anne was about to go into the house to see if Mrs. Odler could give any news of him when she heard some one the other side of the rose hedge. She walked quickly in that direction without calling—for if Tom was not in the mood for work, he sometimes regarded an invisible

summons as a providential warning giving him time to disappear—and came right upon Illingborough.

“ Oh, it’s you ? ” she said curtly. “ I’m looking for Tom.”

“ I haven’t seen him,” said Illingborough. “ Miss Wetherborne, may I—will you advise me ? ”

“ What about ? ” said Anne. She did not want to talk to him, much less advise him, and his appearance, which was agitated and woebegone, annoyed her. Surely he might have had time since yesterday to have rid himself of the effects of becoming engaged, if those were the effects. He seemed, indeed, to be rather more forlorn than when she had come up to him during the “ Worry.”

“ What is it ? ” she asked, without any great sympathy.

“ Jocelyne,” stammered Illingborough—“ Jocelyne—I don’t know if we’re still engaged.”

“ Indeed,” said Anne. The news was nothing to her. Jocelyne, she was sure, meant to have him, but—she was Jocelyne. Did he expect to have his love without lover’s quarrels ; and did he expect Anne to condole with him every time something went wrong ? Her lip curled involuntarily.

“ I want to tell you why, if I may,” said Illingborough, unnoticing. “ I cannot believe that she would really wish me to do what she says. I am not

telling you what she would not wish me to tell. The last thing she said almost was that I had better ask you. That is why I cannot help thinking she spoke impulsively—did not mean it.”

“ Mean what ? ” said Anne, with a shrug. It was rather amusing, perhaps, for him to be so full of Jocelyne to her, to be so careful of not telling her anything Jocelyne would not like him to tell, to be so careless as to tell her everything that she hated to hear. At least it showed how little he dreamed of what her feelings were. Oh, it was very amusing, if she looked at it the right way !

Whether Illingborough would have been hindered by knowing the spirit in which she was trying to listen to his story is doubtful. He had received too many shocks that day to be easily shocked further.

He had seen a revelation of woman such as he would have believed impossible. He had seen Jocelyne—to gain an end to him unutterably mean—weeping, Jocelyne entreating, Jocelyne screaming like a fish-wife, Jocelyne whining like a condemned criminal in the hands of the hangman. What had revolted him most—and made him most patient—was the knowledge that this was his future wife. By the strange fatality of her affection—for he supposed he must still believe in it—he was responsible for her in this special way. This girl tearing all his

unspoken, undefined ideals of love to tatters was all that he would ever possess of that ideal. So he imagined. It was not his way, as it might have been most men's, to make his disappointment an excuse for his escape. He felt the more bound now that the actual chains were loosened.

She had ended by flinging from him in a paroxysm of temper, vowing that she would never see him or speak to him again unless he would do what she asked him.

"That must be half an hour ago," said Illingborough, "and I have tried to find her since. I think I could make her see that what she asks is dishonourable. Of course she doesn't yet, or she would not ask it."

"I suppose you had better tell me what it is," said Anne, for he had begun at the end, and generalised, and tried to minimise Jocelyne's fury and to make the most of his own dull-wittedness in not being able to prove to her her unreason.

He poured out the story now. As Anne had suspected, it was Tom's story in detail. He was to choose one of them—nominally, to go on a visit; actually—as he confessed he more than suspected—to inherit a fortune. But his new relationship with Jocelyne had made the position of judge impossible—apart from the question of legal etiquette, which

was also more than etiquette—as to which Anne understood nothing.

What struck her instantly was that he appeared to think Jocelyne had heard the story for the first time that day, just as he thought Anne was hearing it now for the first time. Should she tell him of Clifford's intervention? It made no essential difference if he was going to withdraw from his judgeship. It would only hurt him to see Jocelyne in a still worse light if he was going to marry her, as apparently he was; for if he were willing to, Anne—not knowing Clifford's real plot and Jocelyne's intentions as adapted to it—could see no reason why Jocelyne, after she had calmed down, should reject him. No doubt she would be mad about the fortune, but to be mad about one loss was not likely to make Jocelyne mad enough to submit to another voluntarily. Jocelyne could calculate even in her worst temper. Yes, she would summon him back.

Anne came out of this train of thought, with which she had travelled far ahead of Illingborough's speech (which, nevertheless, she had taken in mechanically) with the consciousness that all that she herself could say for Illingborough's comfort was that he was silly to make such a fuss about so small a point as the nomination for a fortune. He was very silly. For what, after all, did it matter who got the fortune?

She didn't want it. Joan might, perhaps. But Joan was nobody, and anyhow, it was all so paltry. Jocelyne wanted the thing done meanly, of course, but it wasn't worth making scenes over.

Anne's conscience did not embrace, like Illingborough's, the guardianship of other people's. She could endure other people's faults more easily and forgive them more easily. She said, as soon as a pause on Illingborough's part gave her the opportunity—

“ Why bother about it so much ? Why not go on with your judging ? ”

Illingborough reiterated the formal objections, and Anne grew impatient.

“ Yes—yes—I see that,” she said. “ But it doesn't matter ? Even if you weren't engaged to Jos you wouldn't be absolutely unprejudiced.”

“ I should be much more so,” said Illingborough miserably. “ But in any case, Jocelyne will not hear of my proceeding.”

“ Why ? ” said Anne, puzzled. “ I thought the fortune was what she wanted.”

“ But——”

“ And she would have got it if she weren't engaged—why shouldn't she get it in spite of it ? ”

The case was so absolutely lucid to her. Illingborough groaned.

“ I'm terribly afraid,” he said, “ that is what she

thinks, and I suppose in my stupid way I must have given her some reason for supposing it. I take all the blame."

"For what?"

"For giving that impression."

Anne stared.

"Which of course is a totally wrong one. I had, as a matter of fact, practically decided that I would name you."

It was the very last thing she had expected him to say, and it came like a slash in the face. Just as if a lash had caught her, her cheek paled and reddened in a moment. Then she stiffened.

"Pray why?" she said, all her pride arming her to chastise him. "As a slight compensation to me for not being engaged to you?"

"Miss Wetherborne!" cried Illingborough, horrified. She laughed contemptuously at his dismay.

"I am not surprised," she said, "that Jocelyne is indignant. If I had a brother, I would ask him to horsewhip you."

She turned on her heel and walked off, head in air, leaving Illingborough to his reflections. These—so far as they did not consist of mere chaos and bewilderment—were of the nature of anguished and self-branding wonderings as to what exactly his latest folly had been.

CHAPTER XXVII

CLIFFORD CUTS THE KNOT

WHEN Jocelyne, apparently beside herself with fury, had flung away from Illingborough, she still possessed more self-control than a casual observer would have supposed. The power of calculating, even in her worst temper, was—as Anne had guessed—by no means lost to her ; and one proof of it was—though Anne had not guessed this—that in the last resort Jocelyne had cried out to Illingborough to “ask Anne.”

She could not—it is best to suppose—have foreseen quite all that actually happened, but at least she had decided that Anne, in her scorn of a mere material inheritance, would pooh-pooh Illingborough’s scrupulousness, and shrug at his intense honesty producing the petty storms she hated, and generally make him feel that he was exaggerating trifles. It was detestable that Anne should have to know. Jocelyne would never afterwards—when she had attained her ambition and become the heiress—

have quite the magnanimous feeling that she had expected to have when making presents to Anne and Joan. Anne, at any rate, would know that she was being doled out money that might easily have been her own. Still, the important thing to be secured was not the right to be magnanimous, but the tangible wealth; and if Anne's ridicule could force Illingborough to act in accordance with Jocelyne's desire, Anne's knowledge of the secret could be excused. Later on, when it was all settled, Jocelyne could in her turn make light of Anne's assistance.

Another proof that Jocelyne's brain worked—in spite of her storming—was that she did not forget that she had appointed to meet Clifford not far from the Sea House shortly after lunch. She did not want any lunch; indeed nobody in the Sea House partook of any that day—it is a meal that can be dispensed with in times of great excitement (unlike breakfast and dinner, which even the persons in a tragedy must eat, though stage directions on the subject are few): and she sallied out even earlier than she needed to keep her appointment, which was why Illingborough could not find her when he had sufficiently recovered his spirits to want to reason with her.

The meeting was to have been a record of her triumph over Illingborough, leading in its turn to

the delightful assurance that Clifford really and truly adored her. Jocelyne was aware that his complete adoration depended on her success ; and she had not greatly disliked the knowledge, when she thought her success certain, for just that sort of adoration was what she liked best. She understood it best and felt most safe with it. A man who loved her, as Illingborough might have done, for imagined virtues and intangible ideals, was always liable to find out that he had made a mistake, and it would be a great bother to keep him in the blinded state. A man, on the contrary, who loved her for her possessions—and all the queenship they implied—could never (unless she went bankrupt) find himself mistaken. If he faltered in his allegiance for a moment, she could—so to speak—flash diamonds at him and refer him to her bankers. Besides, the man who loves in that way is not apt to falter. It is far easier to be moved from love of a person—or an ideal—than to be moved from love of a material thing like wealth. Such—Jocelyne felt—was human nature. Men comfortable in the fat valleys do not take as a rule to scaling barren hills.

Now that she was threatened with the failure of her inheritance, she realised that she was also threatened with the failure of Clifford's affections, and she felt utterly miserable. In her own petty

way she had come to love him. He satisfied her eye, his conversation entertained her, his flattery was very pleasant, and he was no critic of her faults. She pictured him as a man fairly well off, pecuniarily and socially, though nothing to what she would make him.

They met in a cornfield, where the poppies were beginning to peep up red among the still green corn, and Jocelyne shivered a little as his always narrow gaze contracted upon her.

"Well, my pretty queen?" he said, in a light tone that did not conceal his anxiety.

She told her story breathlessly, indignantly, self-pityingly, but his own self-pity was too great to allow him even to feign any sympathy for her.

"You've messed it," he said savagely, when she stopped, half-sobbing.

"I haven't," said Jocelyne.

"Yes, you have. Trust a woman!" He swore, and Jocelyne turned on him in a rage. She was not going to be trampled on by him as well as by Illingborough.

"Don't dare to use such language to me!" she said. "I won't have it. I've done my best, and you know it. It's you that have got to think of something now. I'm sick of it all."

"I don't see a chance," he said moodily.

“ Give it up, then ! ” she said. “ And give me up too—I—I don’t care.”

He had been balancing the advisability of doing so or not doing so. Should he clear out there and then, and return to Mr. Mortlake, or look for some new situation ? If he did, everything that he had hoped for was certainly lost. The drudgery of work without prospects would begin again. What a fool he had been to take Jocelyne into his counsel, and make her a partner of his fortunes ! If only he had waited—as he had planned at first to do—Anne might have had the fortune and he might have had Anne. There had been a possibility of it at least, though he could not picture himself marrying Anne. Certainly there was no chance of it now. Fancy Illingborough pitching on her ! Though he might have guessed it too. Birds of such queer feather were bound to get thick. Only, they hadn’t got thick either. It was pure unadulterated pig-headed conscientiousness that had decided Illingborough in favour of Anne. Curse the fool ! Still, supposing there was a chance left, he had best stick to the skirts of it. Jocelyne could have another try at wheedling Illingborough. And what was that she had said about telling him to consult Anne ? Something might come of that. It would be foolish to give up before there was no hope at all left.

Jocelyne had turned her back on him, and was sobbing softly into her handkerchief. She was thinking bitterly that it was the very one she had dropped in Porton Langley days and days ago, in order that Clifford might pick it up and come to her. And now he hated her. The irony of it was very painful.

Not very much later—considering that Jocelyne's feelings had taken a great deal of soothing—this pair of lovers were on their way to the Sea House. It had been agreed that another assault should be made on Illingborough's conscience by Jocelyne, who was to keep her temper and try to work on his reason and affection combined. Anne's advice, if he had taken it, might have weakened him ; so might solitary reflection, which Jocelyne felt sure would have weakened her. Clifford was not to show himself until Jocelyne's new attempt had failed, in which case Jocelyne's suggestion that Clifford should try the effects upon him of threatening physical violence might be tried. Jocelyne was more hopeful of the results to be derived from that than was Clifford, who foresaw two difficulties : the one being that even if it succeeded it would put himself and Jocelyne in a hopelessly wrong and—if Illingborough afterwards invoked the law against him—unpleasant position ; the other being that it might not succeed. Clifford

was a good deal the bigger of the two. There was probably no comparison in physical strength; but Illingborough was a plucky sort of chap, and not exactly a weakling. If it came to blows, he might not know when he had been thrashed.

Altogether, Clifford, as he took up his stand outside the Sea House, heartily hoped that physical violence would not have to be resorted to. In the stuffy lane the time that he waited seemed interminable. He strolled up and down, beat at nettles with his stick he carried, watched a spider at work catching flies in its web, till the flies gave up and buzzed stickily in his face as he watched. All the time the density of the sky seemed to increase and the light to grow less, so that it seemed almost evening in the lane before Jocelyne came out.

He did not know that he had really expected much from her attempt, but her shake of the head signifying failure made him feel savagely disappointed.

“What does he say?”

Jocelyne answered in gasps and jerks that showed her own wrought-up anger.

“He says he ‘can’t.’ He wants me to marry him and go away and forget that there’s such a thing as money. He thinks it can ‘easily’ be done. He’s seen Anne too. I don’t know what she said to him.

She must have told him what I thought she would. He said he had not thought 'every one would be against' him, and 'did I know how he could have offended her?' As if I cared. He seems half-stupid—except about the one thing. I could kill him!"

"Did you tell him so?" asked Clifford cynically.

"I repeated what I'd said before—that I couldn't marry him if he refused my smallest request."

Clifford sniggered furiously.

"You needn't laugh," she went on passionately. "He insults me by refusing. He thinks he's a martyr, but he's really a selfish brute—all men are, I believe. Why don't you do something? Why don't you go to him?"

"Where is he?"

"On the beach. There's going to be a storm soon." Jocelyne began to whimper with excitement. "Oh, everything's going wrong. The boats are there, and they'll be smashed up if it's rough. The *Gull's* pulling now. I don't know where Anne is. She ought to have seen to them."

"Curse the boats!" said Clifford.

"Oh, you don't care about them, I know," said Jocelyne, angry with everybody and everything. "You don't care about anything; but you don't do anything, either."

"What's there to do?" he said gloomily.

"You'd better go and see. If you're afraid to thrash him, you can help pull up the boats. I believe you are afraid. Oh—now there's somebody coming," said Jocelyne, breaking off her disjointed speech and hastily wiping her eyes.

It was only a telegraph boy from Porton Langley, who came up the hill at a very slow pace, with his tongue out like a dog's.

"Telegram—Illingborough," he said, in an injured tone. "People didn't ought tew send 'em—not so hot a day's this."

Jocelyne stretched out her hand for it, but the boy demurred.

"Illingborough's the name," he said; "and there's a answer prepaid."

"You'd better take it to him, then," said Jocelyne haughtily. "He's on the beach."

"An't goin' no farther," said the boy.

"I'll take it," said Clifford, seized with a sudden idea. The boy surrendered it to him together with the reply-form, and Jocelyne, obeying a scarcely perceptible motion of Clifford's eyes, followed him into the house.

"What are you going to do?" she asked curiously, as he tore open the envelope. He read the message without answering, and then passed it to her. The

telegram was from Mr. Waterlane, and ran as follows :—

“ Client dangerously ill. Requires your decision by return.—WATERLANE.”

Jocelyne read it, looked up, and found Clifford's eyes on her. She returned his gaze and, for a moment, neither spoke. Then Jocelyne translated his look and hers into words.

“ We could send the answer without his knowing it ? ” She put it into the form of a question, and Clifford replied—

“ It would amount to forgery if he prosecuted—Illingborough, I mean. It doesn't look as if the old man was likely to. Probably dying.”

“ And you think he would have time before—to—to——? ”

“ To make the will—yes. Very like providence, isn't it ? ” He laughed unpleasantly. “ I don't know that it would be worth Illingborough's while to fuss either. Lawyers aren't supposed to advise their clients with regard to their heirs. I think Waterlane would try to keep quiet about it. One can't trust Illingborough, though, with his conscience.”

“ Would it be a forgery ? ” said Jocelyne, awed.

“ I'm not sure—I shouldn't care to do ten years for a chance—or for you to do them.” Jocelyne

shuddered. "But I doubt if there's ever been a chance like it." He fingered the reply-form, then suddenly crushed it into his pocket—and moved to the door.

"Where are you going?" said Jocelyne uneasily.

"I'm going down to the bay to see Illingborough. I'll give him a last chance. If he says he'll name you, he can write his own wire. If not, I'll take the risk and do it for him."

"You're not going to tell him the telegram's come?" asked Jocelyne. She was not sure what was going to happen.

"Only if he comes to heel. Coming with me?"

"I'll come part of the way," said Jocelyne mechanically; and they walked out into the garden in silence. Where the path cut through the rose hedge she stopped. One could see over on to the bay from there.

"Why, he's in the *Gull*," she said, surprised, "trying to get up the fore-anchor. I suppose I said something about it to him. I believe I did. But he can't possibly beach her himself. You'd better tell him so. You couldn't do it together, and if he pulls up the one anchor the other may drag."

"That would be awkward, wouldn't it?" said Clifford. "You're not coming any farther? Well, then, you'd better get back and tell the boy the telegram'll be coming in a minute."

He went down alone on to the beach, and across it

on to the rocky platform, over which the high tide, now just beginning to ebb, was washing. Illingborough, busy tugging at the anchor, under the somewhat confused impression that the *Gull* must be beached as soon as possible, and that it was his duty to get ready for pulling in as soon as some one came to assist him (he had rather gathered from Jocelyne that she was going to fetch some one, but she might have forgotten in her excitement, for—as in speaking to Clifford—she had mixed up the danger to the boats with the whole calamity of the day)—Illingborough then did not see Clifford at first, but went on tugging.

Clifford stood there in the swirl watching thoughtfully. The *Gull*, in the receding tide, pulled on her stern-anchor. Her bows faced seaward, so far as the cable on which Illingborough was hauling would let her. Once it came up with the anchor, she would be all for the sea, but not seaworthy with her sails ashore. Clifford had noted them under the wooden shelter as he crossed the beach, and he had them in his mind as he called out.

“ Illingborough ! ”

Illingborough turned at the shout, and let the rope run through his fingers again.

“ What is it ? ” he said, seeing Clifford.

“ I wish to know,” said Clifford, “ on Miss Wetherborne’s behalf, if you have changed your mind.”

"About what?" said Illingborough. It did not occur to him that Jocelyne had taken a mere acquaintance into her confidence.

"About your recommending her to Mr. Mortlake."

Illingborough was astounded, and still more annoyed. He had borne patiently and even humbly with Jocelyne, but this was too much.

"No, I have not," he said. "Nor can I see in the least that it is your business."

"I think you had better," said Clifford sullenly.

"I think you had better not say so to me," replied Illingborough, with sudden anger, for which he could not have accounted even to himself. But the most sober men can be wrought up on occasions, and he was wrought up at present. "If you disagree with me in that opinion," he added, in an access of furious politeness, "I shall endeavour to teach you better."

"Damn you!" said Clifford; and then, just as Illingborough was wondering whether it would be more correct to wait on board till Clifford came to fight him or step ashore and deliver the first blow himself, his adversary's whole mood changed.

"My dear man!" he said, with a burst of laughter, "I'm afraid I've meddled. Well, you'll have to forgive me. I was asked to. I'll apologise if you like. But it looks to me at present as though we

should be most usefully employed in getting that boat up."

Illingborough looked at him wistfully.

"I suppose that's true," he said. "I was just going to when you arrived."

"I'll give a hand," said Clifford, and stepped into the rowing boat alongside. "We ought to hurry. I should cut that front rope if I were you." A sort of low southing wind that seemed to scurry over the sea at that moment emphasised his advice. "I say, we want to be quick," he added.

"I haven't a knife," said Illingborough; "have you? No? I expect there'll be one in the cabin. In fact, I know there's one to cut bread with. I'll go down and get it."

He disappeared into the *Gull's* cabin, and as he disappeared, Clifford did with his own knife what he had advised Illingborough to do. Then using the sides of the *Gull* to pull the little boat towards her stern, he cut that cable also. It appeared to take endless moments, but luck was favouring him. A moment ago he had not been clear as to what he intended doing. The notion that the sea might somehow drift his enemy out—perhaps not to return—had come to him in a flash, but it had left him dazed. He had not known how to accomplish it. He was not sure if he had suggested to Illingborough to go into

the cabin or not ; and he had lied about the knife half-unconsciously. At any moment Illingborough might present himself on deck again. Even now he felt that, seeing himself adrift, Illingborough might swim ashore. He was not a bad swimmer, and might manage it even with the tide strong against him. It was strong ! The *Gull* was fifty yards out now. Surely Illingborough must feel the motion ? Clifford stared at the drifting boat, unable to believe that Illingborough had not yet realised his danger, or at least found what he had gone into the cabin for.

But it was not easy to find things in the *Gull's* poky and untidy cabin, and to Illingborough, searching fussily, the motion of the boat did not seem to have changed. When at last he discovered a knife and came up on deck, the *Gull* was well to seaward on her last voyage.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ANNE TO THE RESCUE

HIGH indignation is often more easily felt than explained. When Anne, head in air, straight-backed as some young poplar tree, like that tree also in being one suppressed quiver, removed herself from Mr. Illingborough's presence rather than walked away, she could not have explained even a tithe of her all-possessing wrath. She did not want to explain it. Complete understanding—says the proverb—is complete forgiveness ; and for that very reason, if for no other, Anne would have shrunk from explanations. She did not want to forgive Mr. Illingborough. She would not have forgiven him at that moment if a word from her could have saved him from sentence of death, and he had pleaded for that word upon his knees. She would have rejoiced to see his head, if convenient, upon a charger.

It would be useless to make the attempt on Anne's behalf to explain what she herself so little required to be put either into words or thoughts. Sufficient

to state that in her white-hot rage she forgot that she had been looking for Tom in order to send him to Mazinghope to get help in pulling up the boats, forgot altogether that a storm was impending (these things were excusable perhaps under the circumstances), and strode out upon the cliffs, calling to Buzz, the bulldog, to follow her.

What Buzz thought inexcusable was the fact that Anne did not allow him to stray for a single moment—not so much as to snuff at a rabbit-burrow—but kept him sternly to heel and made him walk a great deal faster than a bulldog cares to, particularly on a hot day.

People at high tension always appreciate the importance of disciplining others; indeed, history would probably show that the sternest martinets have been always the most peppery of individuals.

Anne walked and walked, and Buzz panted and walked, and the period that seemed at times moments and at times years to Anne, seemed to Buzz long and hard hours.

Probably they walked for an hour and a half. Then unconsciously Anne turned homewards. She realised that she had got on to a road again by meeting a telegraph boy with his tongue hanging out. The boy paused in his saunter and drew in his tongue.

“ Hot day,” he said, by way of inviting sympathy.

"Yes," said Anne.

"People didn't ought tew send telegrams—not so hot a day's this," said the boy.

"Why not?" said Anne unfeelingly.

"'Tiddn't right," said the boy. "I jest taken one up to th' Sea House. Illingborough was the name. Answer prepaid."

"That's all right," said Anne, frowning.

"Goin' to be a storm, I dew think," said the boy tentatively, as she appeared to be going on.

Anne stopped. She had forgotten the storm and the *Gull* and everything: yet the storm was coming on very fast. The trees were beginning to shiver now as a prelude to it.

"Are you going through Mazinghope?" she asked sharply. The boy nodded. "Well, you can do something for me, then. Only you must run, mind. I want you to call at Joe Evans' and ask him to bring some one to haul up my boat. If Joe Evans isn't in, tell them at the post office. Say Miss Anne sent you, and they're to hurry. There."

She gave him sixpence and sent him trotting off with his tongue farther out than ever. She herself, with the bulldog lumbering painfully in her wake, set out at a run for the Sea House.

She saw no one in the house as she passed through, nor was there any sign of anybody in the garden, as

she ran down it, calling "Tom" as she went, in case he should be anywhere within hearing. There was no response, and she reached the rose hedge alone.

There she stopped, and put her hand to her eyes. Adrift under bare mast in the little bay and doomed in a very few minutes to be caught in the race that runs round Wrack Head, and so carried into the great bay beyond was the *Gull*, and on board of the *Gull* was Mr. Illingborough. She recognised him by something in his attitude as he stood there on the *Gull's* deck barely a quarter of a mile from shore, but in great danger. Did he not realise the danger? Anne did. Already the waters of the small bay had begun to flick and quiver to the call of the wind that seemed to come from nowhere in short and sudden gusts that vanished only to return instantly. The horizon that had been leaden-hued was now lined, and its lip overhung white and jagged waves. Anne did not pause to consider the view, but ran down the garden path and across the beach. The *Merry* was still there, tied to her ring, bumping a little.

In less than a minute Anne had untied her, and was pulling out after the *Gull*. Buzz was left moaning and panting on the beach. Illingborough did not appear to notice that she was coming to the rescue.

She forgot, as she pulled, that an hour or two ago—even a few minutes ago—nothing short of his head

on a charger would have satisfied her wrath. Indeed, she quite forgot her wrath. The fact that he would soon be in a position not much more satisfactory than that on a charger would be—for whether one has been decapitated or drowned may be presumed to count little after the deed has been done—made a pale ghost of what had been her so great fury. Could she save him still? She did not know, but she could get to him and be with him. Together in the *Merry* they might have a chance.

She pulled on, vaguely wondering how he had got into that plight. She supposed he had seen the need of hauling in the *Gull*, had begun to do so single-handed, and had somehow got the anchors up too soon and then been drifted out suddenly. It mattered very little now the accident had happened.

She was more curious to know the spirit in which he was taking his adventure—and she turned her head to see, when she still was some distance from the *Gull*. He had not hailed her. He might be dazed with fright. She had not seen him in anything like danger before. Suppose he were panic-struck, as he might be. She could not see him at first, for he was stretched on the deck and only his straw hat was visible over the stern. She stood up in the boat to make sure. Illingborough was lying back with one arm on the tiller, keeping the *Gull's* head straight,

in the other hand he held a book, which he was reading.

So that was the way he was taking his fate. Far out the white caps were gathering under a monstrous sky ; close in to the shore the waters had begun to froth about the rocks ; the cliffs looked hard as steel, and about the *Gull* the waves were beginning to leap threateningly. Illingborough was reading calmly. Anne's heart leaped like the waves. He was not afraid, at least. She might have known it, she said to herself ; she had known it, and yet how it pleased her. A kicking wave met the *Merry* broadside on, and Anne sat down hastily to her oars, and pulled forward. She was practical again now, and it was in the most matter-of-fact voice that, as the *Merry* reared up towards the *Gull*, she called—

“ Mr. Illingborough ! ”

Illingborough came to his feet as wonderingly as though it had been a siren hailing him.

“ Miss Wetherborne ! ”

“ What are you doing there ? ” said Anne.

“ Well—the fact is—I——” Illingborough was beginning to involve himself in a long-winded explanation when Anne cut him short.

“ It doesn't much matter—at present,” she said. “ You'd better come on board the *Merry* as soon as possible. You won't get back in the *Gull*, you know.”

"It's most awfully good of you to have come after me," said Illingborough gratefully. "I thought I should have to drift. But don't you think it would be best if you were to row back and warn the coast-guards. I don't like to leave the *Gull* to herself. The wind seems to be getting up rather, and if she were lost, Mr. Wetherborne would be awfully vexed. Besides——"

Anne could have screamed with merriment and impatience combined.

"If you don't come at once, I shan't be able to get back at all. We shall have to pull as it is, and then we mayn't."

"I say!" The idea that Miss Wetherborne could be in danger horrified Illingborough, and for a moment Anne was afraid that he would, with his usual contradictoriness, make amends for his delay by leaping too soon.

"Wait a bit," she had to say. "You may as well come on board dry. Now!"

Next moment Illingborough had leapt, clumsily enough, and was in the *Merry* at Anne's feet, clamouring to know if he hadn't better take both oars, sure that Miss Wetherborne must be tired after rowing all that way, positive that he was much fitter, not having done anything but rest. Anne gave him an oar and bade him keep his breath for rowing.

"We shall have to pull as hard as we know how for the Beacon Cove."

"The Beacon Cove? Aren't we going to go back, then?"

"We're almost past Wrack Head already. We can't go back against this tide. Pull!" said Anne, and smothered his desire for explanations. Then for five minutes they pulled against an increasing current, and Anne, with her back to Illingborough, could hear from his laboured breath that he was getting all the explanation he required by experience.

In another five minutes Anne gave up rowing with a little gasp. They were fifty yards farther out to sea than when they had parted company with the *Gull*.

"We can't do it," she said, and turned round to Illingborough. He was crimson in the face and grunting like a pig, and she expected him to welcome this decision, despairing though it sounded. Instead, he managed to get out—

"Give me your oar."

Anne gave it meekly and retired to the stern, where for some minutes longer she had the doubtful privilege of watching Illingborough row himself out vainly. He was a purple colour, and they had lost a hundred yards when he bent forward on his oars at last, having given in without a word said.

"It wasn't any good," said Anne, with an attempt

at consolation. "You'd better put her head round if you feel up to it. It'll be safer."

Illingborough did this, awkwardly enough, and nearly lost an oar in the process.

"What now?" he said.

"We may get in at one of the coves towards Rock End Point," said Anne, "if the sea doesn't get up too much. There's going to be a gale. You needn't pull. Just keep her straight."

They drifted out gently, as Anne had guessed from the first they would. The foreknowledge had given her a certain serenity with which to meet this moment when the certainty of their danger was established. She felt mostly only sober, with just a touch of curiosity to know what Illingborough would do next. For he had not known the thing for a certainty. He must surely have felt that he was drifting into danger alone in the unmanageable *Gull*, with a gale impending, but he might not have realised the greatness of it. He had made incredible efforts to row out of it, when she warned him — efforts that had taken it out of him and left him exhausted and speechless. Could it be that now he would show himself weak? Anne shivered a little at the thought. She would not be afraid if he were brave; but if he were not brave, how should she keep up? The woman in her fainted with the fear of finding him unmanned. He had

not spoken since he put that simple question. Wouldn't he ever speak? They were parallel with the Point now. Illingborough lifted his head.

"You knew the danger all the time? I can't ever thank you," he said, with a brave simplicity that she had never before heard him use.

Anne smiled back at him. That was the tone she wanted. Next moment, with Anne still smiling, they had rounded the head, and the storm broke on them.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SEARCH

THE sun had been shining when Joan, after her vain attempt to induce Illingborough to give up Jocelyne in favour of Mr. Clifford, left the house routed.

Joan was glad when it went in. The grey sky that supervened, as she walked along somewhat aimlessly, was more in harmony with her feelings. It was, she felt, a grey world whether the sun shone or not ; and it was only sensible to recognise this, and act in conformity with it. Once she had longed to be a sunbeam bringing joy to dark corners and obscure people—preferably as a rector's wife in some quiet English village. Odo's disloyalty had destroyed that dream, and given her yearnings for the more subdued life of a hospital nurse.

Even so she had looked forward to being a breezy cheerful nurse, at whose visits patients would lift their heads and smile.

This morning her thoughts turned to a convent—or at least to some very severe Order of Sisters, who

only attended death-beds and never had to pretend to a gaiety that their vocation would render indecent and impossible.

Joan felt that she could be the severest sister of them all ; and composed her features to the sort of grim austerity that would, under such circumstances, be incumbent upon her. She had also begun to practise a kind of mute's walk, which was rather difficult to manage going up the very steep hill she happened to be on, when the sound of a horse and trap behind her caused her to look round.

A dogcart driven by one of Lady Start's grooms, and containing Captain Hatton and his portmanteau, was the sight that presented itself to her. She paused, and allowed her features to relax.

" Good-morning, Captain Hatton," she said, as the dogcart came up at a slow walk.

" Good-morning, Miss Joan," he said politely. " Taking a walk ? " For a moment he had hoped that she was Anne, and that he would have a last chance of speaking to her, but his handsome face showed no sign of his disappointment.

" Yes," said Joan, walking alongside. " Are you leaving Storr Court already ? "

He nodded. " Have to, unfortunately," he said. " Business."

Joan's first impulse had been to try and find out

whether affairs between him and Anne were progressing at all, and if not, why not. But something in his pleasant but curt tone suggested to her that he would not really welcome inquiry or assistance, and she recollected that she had just cast herself for a more austere—if less interesting—rôle than that of helping lame dogs over stiles. Captain Hatton and Anne were both butterflies. They might be flitting in the sun or the shadow, in any case it mattered little. Her part in aiding them could only come when they were stricken down by some mortal illness; then they would welcome the stern-faced sister visiting them perhaps for the last time.

Still, there was no harm in a little conversation meanwhile.

“How soon it seems!” she said. “I suppose Miss Hatton will be staying on?”

“I expect so,” said the captain, relieved to have got away from his own trouble. “At any rate her young man’s coming down.”

“Her young man?” said Joan, with sudden eagerness.

“Well, I oughtn’t to have said that,” said Captain Hatton, repentant. “I believe it’s one of those not absolutely fixed-up sort of things. They are engaged, but not formally, don’t you know! A secret seems to make it pleasanter. I don’t suppose it will be long

before they confess, as he's coming down. But I oughtn't to have let it out."

"Of course I shall not repeat it," said Joan, and when the dogcart had driven off she turned her steps in the direction of Mazinghope. After all, Mazinghope was her native village. It had treated her ill, but she would not give it up without a struggle.

"Why, we haven't seen you for ages," said the rector, who was the first person to meet her as she walked into the rectory garden.

"I've been very busy the last few days," said Joan, "thinking about whether I ought to become a hospital nurse. I fancied for some time that I was in a way called to it, but it's a difficult thing to make up one's mind about. I thought I'd come and ask your opinion about it—and Mrs. Watterly's. If I took it up, I should like to do so whole-heartedly, and with the approval of my friends."

"Quite so, quite so," said the rector. "You must stop to lunch, and we must talk it over. Odo's eating strawberries, I believe. That lazy fellow never does anything in the garden but eat fruit."

"He rolls the lawn," said Joan, up in arms in Odo's defence.

"Well, he's got a champion in you," said the rector, who was himself anxious to do some summer pruning

of shrubs. "I should go and make him pick fruit for me, if I were you."

Joan went, and in the intervals of eating strawberries somehow managed to learn from Odo—and that without in any way breaking her promise to Captain Hatton to preserve the secret of his sister's engagement—that Miss Hatton had not and never had had the smallest attraction for him.

"Mater admires her frightfully for some reason," Odo admitted; "but I can't see it myself. She's got an awfully stiff manner—frightens me—and as for her backhand, well, it's disgraceful."

Joan, who was rather good at backhand strokes herself, promised to play Odo a single after lunch. She enjoyed that meal in her old unworried manner, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Watterly took the somewhat unexpected line of very strongly encouraging her in the idea of becoming a hospital nurse. Joan almost saw herself driven off, willy-nilly, to scrub floors in some London hospital, and only prevented Mrs. Watterly from writing at once to a matron who was a dear friend of hers, by suggesting that Mr. Wetherborne might not be willing to hand over the money which would be required to start her. Mrs. Watterly then agreed that they must wait and see.

The tennis came to an end sooner than it might otherwise have done owing to the badness of the light,

and when Joan said she must hurry home to get in before the storm, Odo insisted on accompanying her.

"Why, you might almost lose your way," he said, as they set out. "I've never seen it so black in June."

It was an exaggeration perhaps, but Joan did not mind that. She was glad to have Odo with her, especially when the storm broke in a scurry of wind and rain that in no way lightened the face of the sky. She was gladder still to have him when they reached the Sea House, to find something not unlike a catastrophe had occurred.

The first symptoms of it were observable in the porch where was gathered an animated group, consisting of Joe Evans and two other men from Mazinghope, Mrs. Odler, and Mr. Wetherborne.

"Whatever can be the matter?" asked Joan, hurrying up.

Mr. Wetherborne began to unfold a state of affairs unparalleled, he was bound to say, in his pretty long experience. Personally, he had been over to Porton Langley for the day. He had not wanted to go to Porton Langley. The weather was far too sultry, and he had got very wet coming back. He had gone at a sacrifice of his own feelings, and because his absence had appeared to be desired. He had always, he fancied, made it quite clear that anything in the nature of scenes and of promises of scenes was equiva-

lent to telling him that his company was not required. He hated scenes, and he would rather endure discomfort—and even hardship—than take part in them. Very well. He had gone to Porton Langley, and he had had a very inferior luncheon at the Frigate. He did not know what the Frigate was coming to. It might be good enough for tourists and holiday-makers, and if such were the people the landlord wished to cater for, well and good. Mr. Wetherborne himself was not a tourist, and he hoped it would be a very long time before he became one. This passion for rushing about the country like a herd of sheep was in his opinion a sign of decadence ; and it would soon make the Frigate intolerable. It would be a long time before he went over to Porton Langley again. But he thought it would be a still longer time before, if he did go to Porton Langley, he had to come back—to his own house, mind you—only to find a state of affairs which, for discomfort, mystery, and unpleasantness, were—he repeated it—unparalleled in his experience.

“ Yes—but what is it ? ” said Joan impatiently. The three men from Mazinghope were shuffling their feet uneasily, not liking to interrupt Mr. Wetherborne, but evidently of opinion that something was to be done. Mrs. Odler could scarcely restrain herself. “ Is something the matter, Evans ? ” Joan went on.

"Well, Miss," began Evans—a hairy-faced man whose voice seemed to be muffled by having to penetrate the thick tangle about his mouth—"it dew seem that——"

Mr. Wetherborne held up his hand.

"One moment, Evans!" he said, and proceeded to explain what was the matter. It appeared that Anne had sent up a message to Mazinghope for Evans and his companions to come over and help pull up the boats, which were likely to be damaged if left out. Evans and his companions had come. They had been down to the beach, where they supposed they would find the boats they had to pull up. That natural supposition had been a mistaken one. There were no boats there. The *Gull* was not there. The *Merry* was not there. Nor was Anne there or in the house. Jocelyne too seemed to have vanished. Tom was nowhere about. Joan would be aware that to within the last few minutes she herself had been absent. Mr. Wetherborne did not complain of that. He was very glad to see Joan. And Odo. All he wished to point out was that if nobody was ever going to stay in the Sea House at all, particularly at moments when some one in authority was needed to give Joe Evans and his companions instructions as to what they were to do, the Sea House might as well be let or sold. Perhaps it would be best to sell it.

" Oh, I can't abear this," said Mrs. Odler suddenly, and rushed into the house.

" But what's become of the boats ? " Joan asked, bewildered.

" Exactly," said Mr. Wetherborne.

It was at this moment—when Joan was staring at her father, the picture of worried incompetence ; when Mrs. Odler had hurried back into the porch, wringing her hands with the certainty that something dreadful had occurred ; when Odo had drawn Joe Evans aside to try and learn from him whether he had any idea as to what could have happened to the boats ; and when, with a sudden drop of the wind and rain, the sky seemed to have grown more extraordinarily dark than before—that Tom came flying into their midst.

" Miss Anne's swep out intew th' bay," he cried. " She an' Mr. Illingborough. Leastways Mick Gerton says that he see th' *Gull* a-driftin' out with a gentleman a-board, and dreckly after Miss Anne in th' *Merry* seemin' tew follow. He were gone to see tew his goats—Mick were—on th' cliff—and he see 'em nigh tew rounding th' Wrack."

He paused, and all eyes were turned upon him.

" Are you certain of that, Tom ? " asked Odo.

" Mick says it. I come on straight," said Tom.

"For certain they're out in th' storm." His voice quavered with breathlessness and excitement.

If he had wanted to make an impression, Tom had his wish. Nobody spoke until Joe Evans, in his muffled voice that would have tuned well with the Dead March, exclaimed—

"Then may th' Lard have mercy upon them ! "

After that sentiment action was demanded, and Odo gave orders in a quick, matter-of-fact way that made Joan admire him more even than when he was preaching. The first thing necessary was to warn the coastguards, and one of the younger Mazinghope men was sent off running to the nearest station, which was some five miles along the cliff. The other was sent to Porton Langley to ask if the lifeboat could be sent out. Tom was bidden to go up to the Rectory and request the Rector to bring all hands he could to watch the cliffs and beach. They were to equip themselves with ropes and lanterns, Odo said, for it might be that Anne would try to get in somewhere along the coast, or they might be driven in, and there was not likely to be much light until the morning. Odo did not feel hopeful himself, though he pretended to be so for Joan's sake. Tom, on the contrary, though excited in the extreme, was convinced that Miss Anne would effect a landing somewhere not far off, if she tried that in preference

to crossing to the opposite coast. Miss Anne, he maintained, could do anything. He was not sorry to be sent off without questions asked as to his whereabouts during the afternoon, when he had played truant.

Mrs. Odler was left to guard the house with Mr. Wetherborne, who volunteered indeed to accompany Odo along the cliffs, but was of opinion that it would be more useful if he stopped behind and kept a lamp burning in the drawing-room window which faced seaward.

"This," he said, "may actually serve to point them to the bay, and also if, as I quite recognise, they should be unable to row back against the tide, they will at least be encouraged to see a light in the old familiar house, and to know that they are not forgotten."

"Yes," said Odo.

"Besides which, Jocelyne, for all one knows, may be lost on the cliff somewhere," said Mr. Wetherborne. Mrs. Odler's story that she had seen Jocelyne leave the house with Clifford not so very long before seemed to him unsatisfactory. For why should she go out at that hour and with a storm obviously impending? Jocelyne had too much sense to wish to get wet for no reason.

"Quite," said Odo. "The lamp will be very useful.

You may kill two birds with one stone—so to speak.”

It was the first time he had ever been sarcastic, and he was glad to hurry away after it with Joan and Buzz.

In the long hours of search that followed, sometimes in the face of the wind that almost blew them along, sometimes in thunder rain, at first deafened with noise and afterwards oppressed by the stillness that succeeded to the first violence of the storm—for a lull came at one point, and out of brown and purple skies a few rays of the sunset came faintly, before the dark day settled down into a darker night—in these long hours Odo was indefatigable both in spying for the lost ones and in comforting Joan.

And through all the misery and weariness and terror of it Joan carried a constant conviction that even if things more terrible and gloomy had happened than anything that had yet crossed the equable current of her life, even then she would not be so dispirited as ever to wish to go into a convent or even to become a hospital nurse—except perhaps for a few months.

CHAPTER XXX

ANNE AND ILLINGBOROUGH AT SEA

THE storm was more violent on the sea than on the land, yet if Anne could have looked down on herself from some safe place, she would have been amazed to realise how she was almost enjoying that dangerous game of pitch and toss which the sea was playing with them. She had nerved herself for death from the start ; at the start she had looked bravely but gravely in the face of the swirl of water that was now a mountain, now a sudden gulf, for the little boat to climb or sink into. She believed that one of these waves would probably in the end lift the *Merry* too high and dash her down too instantly into the next rearing giant sea ; she hoped that when that moment came she would not cry out over-weakly as she was swallowed down—she and Mr. Illingborough together.

That was at the start. But though this probability remained as conspicuous as ever and not less imminent—for the waves were higher than she had ever dreamed

a small boat could live in—Anne forgot her brave sobriety in a bravery that had actually become frolicsome. Therein she was—so to speak—playing at Follow my Leader. Illingborough had become gay, utterly unlike himself, and was winning smiles and even gurgles of laughter from her—natural ones, not hysterical, but extracted by his abuse of the sea, his appeals to the *Merry* to pull herself together, his jibes at his own oarsmanship, which was nevertheless extremely careful.

They had had one grave talk due to Anne's questioning him as to how he had managed to get adrift. He gave her the account of Clifford's conversation with him, and admitted that Clifford must have cut the cable when he himself was below, though he had not seen him do it.

"And what's more, I can't conceive his object," he said. "Of course we were pretty angry with one another a moment before. I know I felt fierce enough with him, and I dare say he felt the same."

"You seem to have made a good many people feel fierce in the course of the day," said Anne.

"It was unavoidable—except in one case. I can't forgive myself," said Illingborough earnestly, "for whatever I did wrong then. I wish I knew what it was."

"I've forgotten," said Anne lightly. "I had a

sunstroke, I think. Or no—there wasn't any sun. A cloud-stroke."

"I'm sure I said something stupid," Illingborough persisted.

"No," she said, and added, "By the way, did you get your telegram?"

"Telegram? No," said Illingborough.

"You weren't expecting one?" she said.

"I can't say that I was."

That set her thinking. For how had the boy been going back with the prepaid answer if the telegram had not been delivered? Besides, he said he had taken it to the Sea House. Some one must have received it. What if Clifford had been the person?

"I suppose you didn't know," she said at the end of a short silence, broken only by the splash of the seas, "that Mr. Clifford knew what you were here for all the time?"

"All the time? But it's impossible," said Illingborough, and explained to her the circumstances under which he had received his instructions. Evidently there was a mystery somewhere, but neither of them were at the time greatly disposed to bother about it. There was mystery enough around them and ahead of them to make the one that lay behind them of little interest.

Not that they concerned themselves with the mysteries of the sea and of death, either. Beyond this one conversation, the only serious question Illingborough had put her regarded her opinion as to what the best chance awaiting them might be.

Anne's view was that their best and also their only chance was to keep inshore as much as possible, and when an opening occurred in the chain of the rocks make an attempt to beach the boat. Beach was perhaps a rather euphemistic term, for there was no beach in the true sense of the word between the Sea House Cove and Melcombe Sands, fourteen miles to the west—a point impossible to attain in an open boat in that sea. The floors of all the coves between were formed of nothing but smaller rocks. Still, if they could force a channel to these, the boat might be driven near enough inshore to permit of their struggling on to land. It was not a very good chance, partly because it was doubtful how long the boat would live in any case, partly because it was probable that in the course of beaching her she would be upset, even if they could secure the most favourable channel. Anne advised that they should wait for a channel which led to a little cove known as Fern Cove, lying just short of Rock End Point. They would be out of the force of the current that had carried them round Wrack Head.

She had explained this plainly enough in response to Illingborough's question, and he had asked her to tell him when he should put the *Merry's* head for the channel. After that they had dropped the subject, and Illingborough, whom Anne had never known frivolous, had begun, as has been said, to indulge in frivolity, rowing carefully all the time. His best efforts had not prevented the *Merry* taking in a good deal of water, which Anne, armed with his hat, had been baling pretty arduously. The vision of her with his hat had set Illingborough talking about hats as pitchers.

"I've often read of hats being used for that purpose," he said, "but I never expected to see my hat being so useful. Now, if I were a no-hat enthusiast, we should be badly off."

"You might have had a less leaky hat," Anne observed.

"I'll make a point of it when I get a new one. It mustn't leak, I'll tell the hatter."

"He'll think you're mad," said Anne.

"Water on the brain," suggested Illingborough. "Oh Miss Wetherborne, what a low notion. No, I shall confide in him that I am a great squire of dames, that they often faint—when out for walks with me—(they do in novels, or they used to), and that I want a hat that I can run to the nearest sparkling

pool with and carry water back in to sprinkle on them."

"I don't believe I should like to be revived with water from a hat."

"You wouldn't mind if you'd properly fainted. It would just be sprinkled over you—like that." A wave broke over the *Merry's* bows and threw a foam of spray over Anne and a couple of gallons of water into the *Merry*. "And it would come from a crystal pool, remember. You'd like it really; and you would open your eyes of speedwell blue—if you were anything like a real heroine—and softly murmur—— Dash!"

Another wave had lipped over the side of the *Merry* and interrupted Illingborough's flow.

"'Dash' is just what I do murmur—not at all softly, though," said Anne. "I'm quite sure I should murmur it still louder if you threw a hatful of water over me when I'd fainted."

"And I'm quite sure you never would faint," said Illingborough.

It was the first compliment—if it was a compliment—the first personal thing he had ever said to her, and a faint pink came into Anne's cheeks. She felt the absurdity of blushing—it was a blush of a kind—in the middle of that tossing sea, and could not help hoping earnestly (little, after all, that it mattered)

that he had not noticed her. She said awkwardly enough—

“ I don’t know. I never have, but I might.”

“ You wouldn’t,” Illingborough asseverated.

“ Well, it doesn’t matter now, anyhow. We won’t argue about it.” Anne laughed a little, for he was capable of beginning an argument. “ There isn’t time, Mr. Illingborough. We’re getting opposite Fern Cove.” Her voice became grave at once. “ You want to pull your right oar still. Don’t turn her yet. Now your left. The channel’s ahead of us.”

Illingborough looked over his right shoulder as the *Merry* swung round to the shore. Thirty yards ahead of them a tall sharp rock on the left stood out of a black eddy : beyond it to the right were low rocks that were hidden now and again in showers of spray.

“ You must shave the big rock,” said Anne quickly, for they were approaching it now at the great pace with all the sea, as it seemed, in their wake—“ keep under it ! Touch it ! Touch it ! Pull your left.”

They went under it so close that Illingborough’s right oar was ground against it : he only knew that it was broken as they came round into a white froth. If he had known, the loss mattered little, as it happened, for the sea running east was pulling more strongly than any oar. But in his distress he rested on his left oar and it got swept round under the boat. He heard

Anne, he saw Anne saying, "Left, left," and could not pull. Then in a moment the *Merry* had come broadside on in all that spume, and following Anne's eyes, Illingborough saw a great wave coming down on them. Instinctively he leapt to his feet to go towards her.

"Anne!" he cried loudly, and stretched his arms for her.

That was the last thing she heard, for the roaring water took them the next instant and smothered them down. So for a little there was nothing in her ears but that sea-sound that shells give out, and nothing in her eyes but the smart of the sea, and nothing in her body but the desire for breath. Afterwards, there were pitchings to and fro: her feet touched bottom and were dragged again from under her; she was a part of all the reluctance of the sands that the sea drags back from dry land to smother and make oozy. Then suddenly the earth took sides with her, as it seemed: something that was strong and not the sea enclosed her and drew her from the sea, though the sea still pursued. She was conscious of that only for a second.

For it was Anne in a swoon whom Illingborough, breathless himself, half blind with the spray, and staggering like a drunken man, bore up out of the sea and deposited on the rocky strand of Fern Cove.

CHAPTER XXXI

LOVE IN THE COVE

"So I fainted after all," said Anne.

She was half sitting, half lying against the smooth side of an overhanging cliff, with Illingborough kneeling beside her, looking desperately anxious. For some minutes he had been watching beside her lifeless form, chafing her hands, blaming himself bitterly that he could not recollect the proper processes of artificial respiration, going hot and cold by turns. He had thought of climbing the cliff to get assistance, but failed at the first glance to see a way up; he could not go hunting for a path with her lying there—it was impossible. So he had returned to her side and begun chafing again. And now she had come to and was actually speaking to him.

"Thank Heaven!" said Illingborough. "Do you really feel better?"

"I feel all right," said Anne. She stretched herself a little, lazily. She felt intensely inert. "Did you sprinkle me with water from your hat?" she

said, with a smile of recollection. "I feel very wet."

"That's sea-water, you know," said Illingborough soothingly. "We got—rather wet, you know, coming ashore."

Anne shivered a little.

"Oh yes, I remember. What became of the *Merry*?"

"I'm afraid there's not much left of her. You see, what with the rocks and—so forth,"—his eyes went involuntarily to the sea, and Anne's followed,—“there wasn't much chance for the *Merry*."

"No," said Anne, watching the scene before her.

On one who had not been only ten minutes ago in the thick and chaos of it, the scene, for its fury and splendid wildness, might have cast a spell of allure-ment. Under a near and pendulous sky huge waves leapt and humped themselves—nightmares rearing to be quit of the blackness that rode them. They threw it, and suddenly stampeding, raced madly towards the land. And there—among the ramparts and entanglements of the rocks—the wild phalanxes were caught and split in a thousand thunderous units. The spray was like smoke on an ancient battlefield, for the water, poured by this storm far beyond the natural limit of the tide, shattered upon rocks that in a calm they would never have reached.

Anne shivered, and turned her eyes for preference to the cliff.

The calm before a storm is a common phenomenon, but Fern Cove presented that rarer one—calm in a storm. Perhaps there had come that lull that the searchers on the cliffs had noted ; perhaps the cove was protected by the high cliffs which hemmed it in on three sides. Whatever might be the cause, though the noise of the sea filled it, there was no wind raging in it. A suppressed yellow light, such as a storm sunset throws, illuminated it, as it were with sunlight seen through a tent. The cliff opposite looked as if painted by some old master—of ochre tints.

“ Are you really feeling all right ? ”

It appeared that Anne's gazing had distressed Illingborough ; the earnestness of his question seemed to suggest that he thought but badly of her chances of pulling through—and she was to let him know the worst.

“ Yes, really,” said Anne.

“ I was afraid that you were hurt,” said Illingborough.

“ No.” In spite of herself, she felt the pink rising in her cheeks again as it had risen in the boat. When he had called her Anne, she had thought it did not matter : very soon the sea was to have held them both. She

must not let him see that she remembered. "Not a bit," she said lightly.

Illingborough sighed, obviously with relief.

"Then I ought to begin getting back," he said, in his most matter-of-fact way.

Anne stared. "Getting back? Where to?"

"Well, to the Sea House, I suppose," he said, as though it was the simplest matter in the world. "Anyway, to some place where I can get some one to help me bring you up. You see, we can't stop here all night."

Anne could have stopped there for ever—speaking comparatively. She had not thought of getting back or not getting back. She had been thinking that Illingborough had called her Anne. But there is nothing more infectious than the tone of matter-of-factness.

"Of course," said Anne cheerfully. "The only thing is—how are you going to get back?"

"By climbing the cliff, I suppose."

"It's impossible." She had landed there before in calm weather, and knew its inaccessibility.

Illingborough smiled that smile of his which had often provoked a devil in Anne. The smile was not exactly a superior one: it did not condescend at all. It was a smile that implied finality—the smile of the doctrinaire. It implied, almost as if he had said it, "My dear young lady, I have no doubt that what you

say is ordinarily correct. But circumstances demand that the cliff shall be climbed: therefore I propose to consider it climbable, and in fact to climb it." Bridge players will recall the rule which says that if the game can only be saved by a certain card being in one's partner's hand, one must act as if it were there. The chances are two to one that it isn't there, but for the player it is there beyond any manner of doubt. Anne knew that the cliff was not climbable; for Illingborough it was climbable.

He said—

"Of course I'm an awfully poor climber, but I must see what I can do."

"You can break your neck," said Anne.

"My dear Miss Wetherborne!" Illingborough deprecated her exaggeration with another smile more moral than the last.

Seven devils entered Anne.

"Well, you'd better be quick about it," she said. "I'm getting cold. Please don't fuss," she added, as Illingborough began his usual distressful apologies for not having thought of that, for not having done anything or thought of anything (as though he were responsible for water being wet). "I dare say I shall get warm watching you."

"I'll hang out my coat to dry, and then, if you don't mind," said Illingborough, "you could put it on."

"You'd much better keep it on yourself—to break your fall."

But Illingborough had it off, and was suspending it over a rock in silence. He came over to Anne before he started.

"You couldn't tell me which side of the cove is easier to start from?"

"I tell you it's impossible."

"Then I think I'll try the right. If I might suggest that you walked up and down, it would be more warming."

"Oh, leave me," said Anne in a pet, and pretended not to see Illingborough cross the little cove to where some spurs of rock gave a semblance of leading up to the sheer cliff above.

They were not particularly easy to climb in themselves, but Illingborough went at them in a business-like way which Anne had not somehow expected—perhaps she had hoped he would not display it. The thought in her mind was: If he can get up these so easily, he will be tempted higher, and will get higher; then he will find the impossibility.

She was dismayed to see that this was to be the case. Already Illingborough was on the sheer wall of the cliff, and getting higher with a spread-eagled method of progress. She had intended not to look, but now she could not help looking. He was reaching out now

for a tussock that certainly would not hold him. There were sharp rocks below. Anne sprang to her feet, and began hurrying across the intervening space.

"Mr. Illingborough," she called.

Illingborough turned half round, a perilous proceeding where he was.

"Yes?" he said.

"Please don't go any farther."

"It's all right," said Illingborough. "I'm getting up finely."

"You aren't—it's dangerous. I don't believe you can get down now."

"Oh yes, I could—but I don't propose to come down. I'm going up."

Illingborough reached for the tussock as he spoke—caught it and swung out. Anne, staring horribly, could see the grass giving at its roots as it felt his weight. It just held, and Illingborough got a foothold which relieved the strain. To get higher he would have to put all his weight on it again.

"Stop," said Anne, feeling sick. As a matter of fact, she had no need to call. Illingborough had realised at last his position was an impossible one. He did not need to look round this time, but called—

"I'm afraid I have got a bit stuck this time. I shall have to come down and try—if you don't mind getting out of the way——"

He had turned in the moment of falling to see Anne just below with her arms stretched out, and this sentence characteristically was not quite finished off. He fell talking, or rather swung himself off. He came down with a thud on Anne's left, having just missed her and the rocks by a hair's breadth. She stood still looking at him, scarcely able to breathe, unable to believe that he had reached earth uninjured. He having done so, and having lain there a moment to collect his wits, picked himself up as matter-of-fact as ever, and began dusting the sand from his clothes.

"It was awfully clumsy of me," he said. "I hope I didn't startle you?"

"Not in the least," said Anne. She felt her voice shaking. "It—it was very funny to see you."

He looked at her, the least bit hurt. It hadn't been exactly fun, he thought.

"Funny!" said Anne, and turned upon him fiercely. "How dared you? How dared you?" she said.

"But——"

Anne never knew what he was going to say—something ridiculous, no doubt—for at that moment she burst into sobs that shook her all over.

"How dared you? How dared you?" she kept saying; and when he, densely realising that he had startled her, began profusest apologies, she walked

away. It is probable that an onlooker would have been amused—Anne sobbing and gliding, Illingborough sidling after, abjectly apologising. They were too far gone in love to see the humour of it—or Illingborough was. Anne felt hysterical; and it was her involuntary laughter that caused her in the end to regain possession not perhaps of her wits, but of her wit. Something in the manner of Illingborough's repeating in an agonised voice, "My dear Miss Wetherborne, I can't tell you what a brute and a fool I feel to have alarmed you," set her laughing—almost naturally, through her sobs. "It's not that—I'm cold," she said, and began to run. "You can't catch me," she cried over her shoulder; and there was something in her voice that challenged him to he knew not what. He ran after her, slowly at first, then faster, and soon she knew that her challenge had been taken. She increased her pace, and made for the rocks, where she was goat-footed. Often he had seen her leaping lightly from boulder to slippery boulder, and had stumbled and lost ground in her wake. But now, though she went quicker and quicker, he gained ground. She saw that, and dodged and broke back like a hare. The wind began blowing her hair as she ran, and a great heave of rain came on.

"You'd better stop," cried Illingborough, nearly up to her.

| She turned to laugh, and doubled and got away. After that he kept his breath. Hers was going. He could hear her little gaspings, and her leaps were not so bold. It seemed she was aware of her tiring, for she made for the smoother part, where she need only run ; and there she made a spurt, and her feet pattered quicker and shorter. Now he was wearying, and because there was a chance that she might escape him, he also spurted, heading her for a corner of the cliff. She saw her danger and tried to fly past him on her circle, and failed and half turned and held out her arms as though to fend him off, when he grasped at her triumphantly. In that chase the quarry that turns at bay too late is lost. She cried out against him, but he had seized her. He could feel her fluttering like a bird in his arms, and a great fear came over him.

“ Anne,” he cried, “ don’t you love me ? ”

She did not answer, but the fluttering ceased, and he took courage and looked at her, and saw in her eyes the light that is the light of love.

After that the tumult and the darkness were lost upon these two lovers. They did not know it was night, and storms seemed gone from them for ever.

CHAPTER XXXII

MR. MORTLAKE'S WILL

"NOT at home—no," said Mr. Wetherborne.

It was the afternoon of the day following upon the storm, and Mrs. Odler had just come in to announce that a gentleman of the name of Waterlane was in the drawing-room, desirous of speaking with Mr. Wetherborne. Considering the fatigues and the anxieties of the previous night—fatigues and anxieties which he had not (as he had several times announced) expected to survive, and had not by any means surmounted—since one of his daughters was still missing—Mr. Wetherborne felt justified in refusing to see callers.

"Not at home at all to-day," he repeated firmly.

"Not to any one."

"I told the gentleman you was at home," said Mrs. Odler frankly.

"This is very annoying—very annoying indeed," said Mr. Wetherborne, rising.

Mrs. Odler defended herself.

"Well, I knew you was, and I said so, he askin' the question straight out. O' course I could say you had'n slep and was feelin' sick-like, if you wished it, sir, that being truth, I dessay. For what with a-settin' up with that there lamp last night til it a-gan to smell, and then 'cos I was out havin' to pour paraffin into it with your hands—and a mercy you did'n set the house on fire and that there's only the two stains on the carpet—it would'n be strange not if you did feel a retching. And that I could tell him if you wished. But I don't believe meself that he wishes to see you, sir, except for the politeness. It's Mr. Illingborough he wants."

"By all means, Odler, then," said Mr. Wetherborne, "let him see Mr. Illingborough."

"You'd have me show him straight into the garden, sir?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Wetherborne. "Certainly. Or stay. I will explain to him myself." He went out, gracious but melancholy, into the drawing-room, where Mr. Waterlane sat, trim and sharp-eyed, suggesting an early bird on the look out for worms.

"Mr Wetherborne?"

"My dear sir," he said, "you will excuse me, I feel sure, if I am unable to spare you more than a minute. But my nerves are broken. A daughter and

a guest blown out to sea and despaired of—another daughter vanished—a sleepless night. I do not as a rule request strangers to share my domestic troubles, but the circumstances are unparalleled—unparalleled.”

“ My dear sir ! ” said Mr. Waterlane, alarmed and sympathetic. “ Might I ask if the guest you mention—is—is—— ”

“ Mr. Illingborough—yes.”

“ Blown out to sea, you say ? ”

“ Yes,” said Mr. Wetherborne. “ But luckily saved by the sagacity of a dog of ours. A curious thing, because bull-dogs as a rule are more remarkable for courage than intelligence. With a St. Bernard one might have expected it. Buzz, however, assisted by a boy whom I employ in my stables, tracked them.”

“ Out to sea ? ” said Mr. Waterlane, astounded.

“ To a cove in which Mr. Illingborough, together with my daughter, managed to effect a landing. They lost the boat, though. I do not blame them or say that they could have saved it—the sea was a rough one. But I have put in before now myself in the same spot. It may be that the sense of proprietorship makes one more careful. I am grateful that they are saved. If you care to see Mr. Illingborough and can spare me——? ”

"Delighted. I mean—thank you," said Mr. Waterlane.

"Would you object to finding him for yourself in the garden? We are naturally short-handed. And my own nerves—or I would fetch him myself. Through the French window is the shortest way—straight on, I fancy—yes."

Mr. Waterlane found himself alone in the garden of the Sea House. The sun shone brilliantly upon it; the flowers, beaten down by the storm and the rain, were beginning to raise themselves refreshed from the wet earth. A small brown-faced boy was hoeing leisurely in one of the beds.

"Could you inform me," said Mr. Waterlane, stopping to address him, since no one else was visible, "where I shall find Mr. Illingborough?"

The boy turned.

"What for?" he said.

"Well," said Mr. Waterlane blandly, "I could tell him that, couldn't I, when I saw him?"

"Yew middn't see him," said Tom, "if he didn't want yew. I dunno as he wants anny one."

"Oh, I think he'd see me," said Mr. Waterlane, and made an appeal to a girl who, with a young man in the dress of a curate, came towards him at that moment. "I wonder," he said, "if you would be good enough to direct me to Mr. Illingborough, who

is, I am told, in the garden. I have asked this lad, but without success. He seems to think——”

“It’s exceedingly rude of you, Tom,” said Joan, interrupting. “I hope,” she said, turning to Mr. Waterlane, “that you will excuse him. Things are rather at sixes and sevens in this house, and Tom is so pleased with himself at being right about Fern Cove that he has forgotten his manners. He will apologise to you later. I think you will find Mr. Illingborough just the other side of the rose hedge.” She walked on with Odo, and Mr. Waterlane proceeded towards the rose hedge.

“Yew’d better cough,” called Tom, who had listened to Joan’s directions without making it clear whether her sketch of his future conduct was a correct one or no. “He flewed out on me.”

“Eh?” said Mr. Waterlane, stopping. “Cough?”

“He’s courtin’,” said Tom, grimacing.

“Oh, I’ll cough then, certainly,” said Mr. Waterlane. He coughed so loudly and frequently that when he arrived at his destination Illingborough and Anne had almost disappeared in the opposite direction, and he had to call out to prevent being left behind.

“Illingborough—I say—Illingborough!”

Illingborough stopped, scarcely able to believe his eyes. “Mr. Waterlane!” he said, and came towards

him, accompanied by Anne. "I'm awfully pleased to see you," he said, as he shook hands.

"Didn't look like it—didn't look like it," said Mr. Waterlane, turning an inquisitive glance on Anne. "This young lady is——?"

"My future wife," said Illingborough proudly, and Anne found her hand being shaken very warmly by the little gentleman and her face being sharply scrutinised. She liked his looks and smiled at him from her big grey eyes, and he smiled back.

"I presume that for the present I must refer to her as Miss—Miss——?" He paused for the name to be supplied him.

"Anne," said Illingborough, and was puzzled by the great satisfaction visible upon Mr. Waterlane's face.

"That's right—that's right," he said, and turned to Anne with his most courteous manner. "Now, Miss Anne, you'll forgive me if I take him from you. I've got to talk secrets to him. I dare say you think he mustn't have any nowadays, and perhaps he won't when he gets back to you; but in the meantime I may have him for five minutes' business?"

She smiled again and gave her curt nod and left them. Whereupon Mr. Waterlane turned upon Illingborough with a great pretence of indignation.

"This is a nice state of affairs for a lawyer to get

into. Shipwrecks, rescues, engagements, eh? What, in the first place, do you mean by getting engaged to one young lady and naming another for a visit to her uncle? Not but what it's lucky in a way, as I shall be able to show you."

"I have named nobody," said Illingborough, puzzled.

"In your telegram, I mean."

"I never sent one."

"What?" Mr. Waterlane started.

Illingborough took from his pocket-book a letter which he had composed that morning, and handed it over to Mr. Waterlane, to whom it was addressed.

"I was going to post it by the next post," he explained. "You will see from it all that I have done or failed to do. Mr. Mortlake will have every right to be angry. That I feel. But I also feel that I ought never to have accepted his instructions."

"As far as that goes," said Mr. Waterlane, "I may inform you that they are at an end."

"And Mr. Mortlake himself?"

"Is better. In fact, his doctor told him last night that he need be in no hurry to make his will. I always told him that the doctors might be wrong, and now he has had to own that I was correct."

"Thank Heaven!" said Illingborough fervently:

“ Instead of which he has made it, I believe—the will. Not with us. He merely told me that he would do so this morning at latest. I have come down for quite another reason. I’ll tell you about it in a minute. I want to know what’s in this.” He tapped Illingborough’s letter and began to read it.

It contained Illingborough’s notice of withdrawal, together with a statement of reasons for this proceeding ; and Illingborough had to supplement it a good deal in order to satisfy Mr. Waterlane’s curiosity. Indeed, much was extracted from him—in regard to Clifford and Jocelyne—that he had intended generously to keep secret.

“ There can be no doubt,” said Mr. Waterlane at the end of something like half an hour’s cross-examination, “ that those two sent the telegram. And you say this Clifford tried to drown you. A very skilful rascal. But how the deuce did he ever get hold of your instructions ? You didn’t speak of them to any one ? ”

“ To nobody at all—until yesterday.”

“ What sort of a man was he—to look at ? ” asked Mr. Waterlane, reflecting. “ Clifford was his name, you say. You didn’t hear any other ? An alias, of course, is the most obvious stock-in-trade of a criminal. It serves useful enough purposes, no doubt.”

" I never heard any other name," said Illingborough. " At least when I knew him at school, as I did curiously enough, his name was Beaver. An uncle left him his money on condition that he changed it."

" Ah—h ! " said Mr. Waterlane. " We've heard of that uncle before. The fact is, Illingborough, the fellow's Mr. Mortlake's secretary. Must be. Beaver's the name right enough. I expect he listened at the keyhole. Mr. Mortlake was getting rather anxious to know when he was coming back to finish the scarab work. From Madeira. We might have thought of the connection—if we'd known anything of Clifford down here. Of course we didn't."

" I'm afraid I thought of nothing sensible," said Illingborough apologetically. " And I shall always reproach myself with the idea that I might perhaps have saved Jocelyne from him."

" She's supposed to have gone off with him ? "

" We are afraid so."

" Thinking she would inherit on the strength of the telegram ! There seems to be a certain similarity of tastes and ideas between the young lady and Mr. Clifford Beaver that may make them happy together. Well—I don't see what you could do to stop it, Illingborough, I really don't. You seem to have had some little difficulty in looking after yourself last night."

"I should have been drowned but for Anne," said Illingborough.

"So you're going to try to make up for it in the only way," said Mr. Waterlane slyly. "A capital plan. And she seems to me a most charming young lady. Not too much to say, eh? Leave the talking to you, Illingborough, what? If I keep you much longer, though, she may begin to have something to say to me. So I'd better tell you my news. You haven't inquired yet why I came down."

Illingborough apologised. He still felt somewhat confused from the stresses of the last two days. Would Mr. Waterlane excuse him for any apparent lack of interest?

"I will," said Mr. Waterlane. "But I think you ought to be interested in what I have to tell you. I came down here at Mr. Mortlake's request to decide a little wager we had. I have to confess beforehand that my part of it involves an injustice to you. When that telegram arrived with the message 'I advise Jocelyne,' I happened to be at Mr. Mortlake's. He'd just got over his bout. More by way of amusing him than anything I said to him, 'Now what would you bet that Miss Jocelyne hasn't captured her judge?' 'A thousand pounds,' said Mr. Mortlake without hesitation. I wouldn't take him of course, but I stuck to my point. I must tell you that my

objection to his plan from the first was that it would tend to a judgement of Paris. I reminded him of that. Mr. Mortlake wouldn't hear of that. 'You've shown me an honest lawyer,' he insisted, meaning you, of course, Illingborough, 'and there'll be no Paris about his judgement!' 'He's only recommending for a visit,' I reminded him, and at that he hummed. 'If he's named the girl he's in love with,' he said, 'I'll leave my money to charity. But he hasn't. You don't believe it? Well, go down and see and oblige me.' 'I don't wish to defraud Miss Jocelyne of her visit,' I said. 'I only say he probably admires her. Let her come and see you.' 'And inherit my money?' he said. 'We agreed,' I replied, 'that there was to be no connection between the visit and the money.' 'Nor will there be,' he said. 'And for this reason. I intend to leave it to Illingborough himself.' "

"What?" said Illingborough, startled.

"That's what I said," said Mr. Waterlane.

"I couldn't possibly accept it."

Mr. Waterlane shrugged.

"You'll do as you please," he said. "But I believe he has now drawn up a will to that effect. He intended to all along, so he told me. He said he might be eccentric, but he was also logical. He wanted to leave his money in the best way. That might, he thought,

mean his most satisfactory relation, or it might mean some one else. When he saw you, he decided on his heir. You cannot help it if you look reliable, Illingborough."

But Illingborough was distressed. It was most awfully kind of Mr. Mortlake of course to have thought of such a thing, but he was entirely mistaken, and in any case it would be unfair and impossible, and generally unthinkable. Mr. Waterlane could not take that view.

"Mr. Mortlake may change, of course," he said. "I don't think that he will personally. And I don't see how any one can dispute it. I'm rather inclined to think he will be all the more bent on his plan when he hears my story. And after all," added Mr. Waterlane slyly, "if you marry Miss Anne, then Mr. Mortlake's 'most satisfactory relation' will get the fortune too. But now I must be getting back. Business, Illingborough, business."

"I shall be ashamed to go into the house after what you have told me," said Illingborough. "I hope you will tell Mr. Mortlake I do not want the money."

"Certainly," said Mr. Waterlane; and on that understanding was allowed to take his departure. He had lunch first, however, and the privilege of hearing from Mr. Wetherborne his disgust at Clifford's

conduct, a disgust which was heightened by a letter from Jocelyne, which had arrived while Mr. Waterlane and Illingborough were chatting in the garden.

"She marries him to-day," said Mr. Wetherborne, and read a piece of the letter. "'Mr. Clifford will marry me, because I expect to get my uncle's fortune. He has no money of his own. I do not know that he would marry me otherwise; though he is frightened to-day for a reason I cannot tell you. Only, I know that he did what he did because I tempted him. And I must try to make up to him for that.' They give us no address," went on Mr. Wetherborne pettishly, "and I cannot understand Jocelyne's reasoning. It appears that she with her eyes open is marrying not only a murderer in intention—but also a penniless adventurer. My little Jocelyne—and he dares to accept that self-sacrifice."

"Perhaps they will manage to be happy," said Mr. Waterlane sympathetically.

"I fail to see how they can be," said Mr. Wetherborne. "They are to live in one of the colonies. Jocelyne expects to come into my brother-in-law's fortune. But I do not suppose he would dream of leaving it to a colonist. It is a great mistake to go thousands of miles away like that."

"Less easy for the police to find him," suggested

Mr. Waterlane, "had there been any need of it. Luckily there isn't."

"Quite so," said Mr. Wetherborne. "It is the most astounding thing I have ever known. He was a man I believed in thoroughly. The pleasantest manners."

"I have known pleasant-mannered men," said Mr. Waterlane dryly, "who were hanged."

Anne and Illingborough drove him to the station; and it was on their way back together that Illingborough narrated to her the new development that Mr. Mortlake's eccentricity had taken. She had not wanted a fortune before, and it did not impress her now. All that she could understand was that her uncle must be one of those like herself who knew Illingborough. She felt a kindly feeling for him, and said she should like to know him. But she agreed that Illingborough could do what he liked about the money.

As they got home, a groom on horseback, in Lady Start's livery, was waiting at the gate.

"A note for you, Miss," he said, touching his hat.

Anne took it and read—

MY DEAR,—So it is the fierce young man. I was afraid it would be. Tell him I hate him, and always shall, no matter how polite he is or how long he argues with me. But if he brings you to see me sometimes, I shall disguise my feelings as much as possible, and he

may even fancy, if he is very innocent, that I rather like and respect him. Fancy an old woman respecting a young man! Comic, isn't it? Good-bye, little wretch, and come soon, and don't ever let him glare at me.

GEORGIANNA START.

Anne passed the note on to Illingborough, and asked the groom to tell Lady Start that they would call on her the next afternoon. She was very happy. They went into the garden together, and Illingborough fancied that he had never seen the grass so green before. But that might be due to the unusually heavy rain that had fallen during the night.

THE END

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